Coming Out by Staying In:
Men Who Have Sex with Men in the Niagara Region and How They Represent Themselves Online

by
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For Alex Scordas ~
Your love, support and even distractions
are what made this possible.

Abstract

In regions without a gay enclave and limited traditional gay venues, the Internet has become an important space for men who have sex with men (MSM) to connect. Understanding that socio-spatial relations govern gendered and sexual subjectivities, this study examines how the personal advertisement site, *Craigslist*, and the dating website, *PlentyOfFish* (*POF*), regulate the representations of MSM on those sites in the Niagara Region. Relying on two hundred fifty personal advertisements collected on *Craigslist* and one hundred dating profiles collected on *POF*, I develop two case studies that explore how website design and policies, performativities and notions of privacy contribute to the production of MSM representations. Using a queer theoretical approach, I deconstruct processes in these sites which produce gendered and sexual subjects. This study finds that heteronormative discourses embedded in the complex geographies of the two sites of study govern the gendered and sexual representations of MSM. The MSM representations examined in these case studies typically present particular intersections of masculinities that attempt to resemble hegemonic understandings of masculinity. These heteronormative discourses limit the queer expressions. The limiting of queer expressions challenges the utopian understandings of the Internet as a space for MSM to explore their gender and sexuality.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Observations and Research Question

Many mid to large cities have a gay enclave; a neighbourhood or part of a neighbourhood that contains gay commercial venues and a residential area in which non-heterosexuals reside. However, and like many small and medium size Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) in Canada, the Niagara Region of Ontario has no such enclave. While conducting the research for this work, I found that a gay bathhouse had recently closed and two LGBTQ clubs were open for limited hours. These three places were the only permanent LGBTQ establishments in the Niagara Region around the time I conducted this research.[1] While non-heterosexual organizations like Out Niagara host dances and other socials, these events and the venues hosting them only offer temporary spaces separate from heterosexual-dominated space.

The Regional Municipality of Niagara, or the Niagara Region, consists of twelve local municipalities. The twelve municipalities are: Fort Erie, Grimsby, Lincoln, Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Pelham, Port Colborne, Thorold, St. Catharines, Wainfleet, Welland, and West Lincoln. Each of the twelve municipalities differs greatly in population size, demographics, and social class. St. Catharines is the largest municipality and had a population of 131,400 in 2011 (Niagara Region, nd., Niagara Region Population 1996-2011). Historically, St. Catharines has been an industrial city based on automobile manufacturing. This industry has, however, dramatically declined in recent

[1] The two LGBTQ clubs closed within nine months of the data collection for this work. There are currently no permanent non-heterosexual venues in the Niagara Region.

decades. In contrast, the least populated municipality in the Niagara Region, the rural township of Wainfleet, had a population of 6,356 in 2011 (Niagara Region, nd., Niagara Region Population 1996-2011) and has an agriculture-based economy.

For almost thirty years, geographers have argued that there is a relationship between place and the governance of social relations through hegemonic understandings of sex, gender and sexuality (Valentine, 1993; Bell & Valentine, 1995; McDowell, 1999; Nash, 2006). Browne (2007), for example, claims that mundane, taken-for-granted processes heterosexualize everyday space. As a consequence, non-heterosexuals are "othered" while occupying these spaces. Conversely, others argue that homosexual processes can homosexualize spaces (Bell & Valentine, 1995; Browne, 2007). However, even within gay villages across North America, the embodied subjectivities of gender and sexual desires are governed by hegemonic norms as understood through LGBTQ politics and social relations (Bell & Valentine, 1995; Binnie, 2004; D'Emilio, 2006; Nash, 2011). But what processes govern sex, gender and sexuality when there is no material locus? This question forms the focus of my research. **Niagara's lack of a gay village and lacking other permanent non-heterosexual establishment raises the question: How are local places governing the gendered and sexual subjectivities of local LGBTQ subjects?** This is where my interest in this research lies.

Given the lack of material space, I look to the Internet as a space where men who have sex with men (MSM) connect. As such, the question herein is, how do particular online spaces govern the representations of Niagara MSM within those sites?

Since the public release of the Internet in the 1990s, social scientists have heralded it as a space with potential for non-heterosexuals (Szulc & Dhoest, 2013). The "counter-sites" of the Internet provide the possibility of non-hegemony identities and performativities that may, under specific circumstances, prove difficult in material space (Wang, 2011). For instance, Hillier & Harrison (2007) argue that the Internet provides a safe-space for youth seeking same-sex experiences to explore their sexuality. Heterosexual hegemony over material spaces and the lack of permanent commercial venues in the Niagara Region makes digital "counter-sites" a potentially fertile "space" for MSM in Niagara to connect.

The Internet has grown in a "mind-boggling" manner (Hewson *et al.,* 2003, p. 4-5). Its use has become so commonplace through networked computer systems, and more recently the development of smartphones and tablets, that the "World Wide Web" and the "Internet" are now household terms (Hewson *et al.,* 2003). In addition to, and since the mid to late 1990s, social scientists have recognized that online activities impact how we socialize (Waskul, 2003). Waskul (2003) states:

> Through the 1990s, as the social, cultural, and institutional world got progressively "wired," we were all participants and spectators in the sometimes better, sometimes worse; sometimes obvious, sometimes subtle; sometimes surprising, sometimes predicable; and always varied changes that resulted from this restless wiring. (p. 1)

The "wiring" of the social, cultural and institutional world is creating new social and political spaces for interactions amongst and between people around the globe. It is important to note that unequal access to the Internet exists because of the urban and rural divide, inequalities in socio-economics, age and computer literacy (Chen & Wellman, 2005; Servon, 2002).

The Internet may act as a relatively safe space to practice or engage in marginalized behaviours. This is certainly true of people exploring their sexualities. Discussing studies conducted in the early 2000s, Brown *et al* (2005) state, "A range of studies from the U.S. and the U.K. of gay men have found between 17% and 34% of gay men have used the Internet to find sexual partners" (63). In a 2013 study, Gordon (2013) found that gay men access online dating services more frequently and for longer periods of time than their heterosexual counterparts. Online dating services and other sexualized websites promote social opportunities for marginalized people who face hostility in public arenas controlled by hegemonic social groups (Herman, 2007).

Among geographers of gender and sexuality, discussions of the Internet have largely focused on its potential contribution to the rebranding or decline of gay villages (see, for example, Ruting, 2008). The younger generation (twenty- and thirty-something year olds) were born in the Internet age. This may mean that they are more comfortable connecting online rather than in a bathhouse. This may, in turn, render such material space unnecessary (Mowlabocus, 2010; Ruting, 2008; Sanders, 2008; Usher and Morrison, 2010). These online connections may either compliment or alter gay male cruising patterns, including where and how connections between men are made (Brown, 2008). Although studies in the geographies of gender and sexuality argue that material and digital spaces are mutually constitutive (Hillier & Harrison, 2007), the analyses are often unidirectional with emphasis on material space while digital spaces are viewed as complimentary (Downing, 2013). Current geographic conceptualizations of digital space limit the ability to analyze how digital spaces govern particular representations of subjects online. It is in this lacuna of knowledge that this work seeks to explore.

Critical Approach

In this thesis, I claim that websites govern the gendered and sexual subjectivities of those who create embodied representations on those sites. I claim that normative hegemonic understandings of gender and desire inform the representations of the subjects that I sampled on specific the virtual sites. To investigate these claims, I explore how website design and structure, the performativity of MSM virtual subjectivities online as well as surveillance govern particular gendered and sexual representations of the self online. The data collected in this thesis suggests that Niagara area MSM subjectivities are informed by notions of privacy to (re)produce legible representations of the self online. These legible, virtual bodies, as represented within the data of this thesis, are (re)produced through the intersectionality of masculine subjectivity.

In order to be successful in socializing online, one must represent gender and sexuality in a legible manner. For this research, I use queer theory to analyze the gender and sexual subjectivities of MSM online. The definitions of *queer* and *queer theory* seem as fluid as the very concept of gender and sexuality (Brown *et al*, 2007). The scholarly definitions of *queer* and *queer theory* are highly contested. However, Brown *et al.* (2007) define queer theory as a questioning of "… the supposedly stable relationship between sex, gender, sexual desire and sexual practice. This challenge to the supposed correspondence between desires, identities and practices consequently disrupts the stability of homosexuality that this correspondence shores up" (p. 8). Simply put, queer theory in geography seeks to destabilize essentialist notions of sex, gender and sexuality (among others) through space and time.

Since this thesis examines men exclusively, I need to consider masculinities. Geographies of masculinities emerged from feminist social and cultural geography examining "structures, processes and places of inequality and injustice that sustain unequal gender relations" (Gorman-Murray & Hopkins, 2014, p. 1). Masculinities are socially constructed identities related to other gender identities (Gorman-Murray & Hopkins, 2014). As described by critical feminist frameworks of gender power, there is no singular masculinity. Rather, as pioneered by R. W. Connell (1998; 2000; 2005a; 2005b), hegemonic masculinity not only differentiates masculinity and femininity, but also produces a hierarchy of masculinities. Gorman-Murray & Hopkins (2014) state, "Hegemonic masculinity is the normative archetype that occupies the apex of the gender order, channelling power and creating an ideal of masculinity that men might try to (but rarely) achieve" (p. 7). What makes up this archetype is the intersectionality of markers of identity such as sexuality, ethnicity, age, class, etc. (Gorman-Murray & Hopkins, 2014). This intersectionality becomes important when considering normative subjectivities. Queer theory and geographies of masculinities are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Gathering & Analyzing Evidence

In order to consider my argument, I analyze personal advertisements and dating profiles on two websites that provide digital spaces for MSM to connect. I collected personal advertisements from *Craigslist*[2] and dating profiles from *PlentyOfFish* (*POF*)[3] in order to create two case studies. I chose social media sites in the form of personal advertisements

[2] www.niagara.craigslist.ca
[3] www.pof.com

and dating sites for three reasons. Firstly, personal advertisements and online dating sites presume social interactions (Wang, 2011). Secondly, these sites provide discursive representations of the self in regards to gender and sexual subjectivities (Bogetić, 2013; Wang, 2011; Farr, 2010). Thirdly, advertising the self online only works insofar as it is legible to others.

Because they recognize the complexities of doing research online, Geographers rarely conduct case studies there. One of the main critiques of online research is questions regarding authenticity (see Bhatt, 2012). For this research, however, I ignore questions of authenticity. Authenticity is a problematic term as it legitimizes particular subjectivities while it dismisses others. This leads to the questions concerning what constitutes "authentic" and who decides what "authentic" may entail. The extent to which I consider authenticity is reserved to complaints included in personal advertisements and dating profiles about "inauthentic" others representing themselves within the two spaces examined.

I chose *Craigslist* and *POF* because they are both free (albeit there are the options to pay, but it is not necessary to communicate with others on the site) and they are the most popular sites in their fields (i.e. online personal advertisements and online dating sites, respectively) (Craigslist, 2015; POF, 2015). Using free, well-known websites may make the digital sites more accessible to those unable or unwilling to pay-for-use. Using such websites also opens up the possibility to MSM who are unfamiliar with strictly homosexual websites. This is particularly useful when including MSM who are in the early stages of exploring homosex and are not well-versed in the existing online communities available.

Discursive Subjectivities Online

Like any space, power relations embedded in digital space govern the subjectivities of those occupying the spaces. Discursive forces shape key features that govern digital bodies. Results of these discursive forces include: website layout, website regulations and policies, social interactions, and surveillance. Understanding that dominant discourses shape the Internet and also shape how subjects represent sex and gender (Szulc & Dhoest, 2013), I use these four characteristics to seek how sexual representations are formed online (and possibly offline). Queer theory, as discussed in Chapter 2, promotes a critical discussion concerning gendered and sexual subjectivities on the two sites of study. It is important to note that due to complex geographical and social relationships in the sites examined, these four categories do not constitute a complete list. The queer geographic analyses on the sites of study provides a preliminary work concerning the regulation of MSM representations online.

In this thesis, the analysis of each site of study, *Craigslist and POF*, are divided into their own respective chapters. The analyses are separated to prevent this work from becoming a compare and contrast analysis. By separating the analyses, I offer critiques and analyses of the sites independent from the other. The conclusion of the thesis brings the two chapters together to present the governing forces of Niagara MSM gender and sexual subjectivities.

Chapter 4 explores the representation of the self and other in personal advertisements on *Craigslist*. This highly sexualized and visible space produces representations of the self and others in a particular relationship to gender, sexuality, body image (or description)

and health. Chapter 5 explores the representation of the self and other using dating profiles on *POF*. Unlike the hyper-sexualized website *Craigslist, POF* promotes relationships and dating while banning what they define as "obscene" or pornographic material. Although *POF* restricts sexualized representations, subjects work within the confines of the site to connect with men for the purpose of having sex. As the following chapters discuss, complex geographic and social relations occur within these respective spaces governing online representations of the self.

Coming Out by Staying In

I titled this thesis *Coming Out by Staying In: Men Who Have Sex with Men in the Niagara Region and How They Represent Themselves Online.* Chapter 6 (the concluding chapter) pulls together the similarities and differences between the two sites of studies to express how particular discourses govern ongoing interactions between and among gendered subjects online. I must state, however, that I am not talking about "coming out" as a monumental testament of non-heterosexuality. Rather, "coming out" in this thesis refers to expressing one's homosexual desires when (re)producing representations online. Lewis (2012) argues that coming out is an ongoing process of "coming out" and "re-closeting" one's self based on the space one occupies. This ongoing process may be transferable to mobilities between physical selves to online representations of the self. What may be one's gendered and sexual identity in material space, then, may differ from their online representation of the self. Even if one's material self is the same (or at least similar) to their online representation of the self, they still "out" themselves in a particular way while expressing their sexual desires online.

Focusing on the personal advertisements and profiles as discursive subjectivities in the way I suggest here promotes a discussion of how digital space governs particular subjectivities. The two sites explored are very different in their design and policies. As such, they render different but comparative results. Exploring the similarities and differences between the two online sites provides insight into how discursive forces regulate MSM subjectivities in the samples collected. The concluding chapter of this thesis seeks to mediate how these discursive forces in website layout, policies and regulations, performativities and surveillance inform the narrative of "coming out" in the online representation of the self.

Summary

In this introductory chapter, I presented my main claims of this thesis, and briefly introduced the conceptual framework on which this argument is based. In this thesis, I argue that embedded heteronormative discourses limit the queer expressions of MSM on particular websites. I found that MSM representations in my data that challenge heteronormativity are constructed in particular ways to conceal material identities of the subjects. I claim that these self-censored representations suggest a hidden population of MSM who mediate privacy online and in material spaces to conceal their material identities in a heterosexual dominated public. This reading of digital spaces, therefore, challenges the utopian views of online spaces and queer expressions. These sites might be limiting for those who express their selves in particular queer ways.

My work presents how geographic scales between the nation, local, body and digital are interrelated. The complex relationship between scales contributes to particular socio-

spatial constructions of subjectivities. The Internet is not an isolated space for marginalized populations to organize and express their representations freely. Current national laws and neoliberal cultural understandings regarding homosexuality, a local heteronormative dominant public, embodied performativities and heteronormative discourses embedded in the infrastructure of websites regulate MSM representations. These socio-spatial regulating forces produce what I consider to be a normalized script of MSM subjectivities. While particular MSM queer expressions may transgress heteronormative sensibilities in these digital spaces, they remain informed by the heteronormative discourses regulating them.

As the Internet becomes intertwined in daily living, I assert that it is folly to analyze modern socio-spatial construction of subjectivities without considering the digital realm. My work provides geographical insight into how the aforementioned scales contribute to MSM subjectivities. In particular, it provides analytical tools to examine digital representations of MSM and how those representations are interrelated with various geographic scales. More importantly, my work provides the conceptual framework and a suite of methods that may help others explore how marginalized groups both use and are constrained by the possibilities of the digital world. Although this work is preliminary and set in a very specific time and space, it presents a geographic site to explore gender and sexuality currently under-researched.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I introduced the theoretical framework that shapes my analysis of how virtual spaces govern embodied representations of gender and desire. This chapter discusses this in greater detail. My work is organized to deconstruct the online gendered and sexual subjectivities of MSM in the Niagara Region who occupy the digital sites of *Craigslist* and *PlentyOfFish* (*POF*). This chapter has three purposes. First, it considers queer scholarship and how it relates to spatial performativities of gender and sexuality. Considering queer scholarship and subsequent queer geographies provide insights into ways in which spatial relations govern embodied performativities. This chapter begins by exploring the broad discussion in queer geographies concerning the spatial governing of gender and sexuality. This portion of the chapter draws from philosophies set forth by scholars such as Judith Butler (2008:1990) and those who have taken up her arguments to explore how regulatory practices produce coherent representations through the matrix of gender and sexual norms.

The second purpose of this chapter is to present the conceptualization of the Internet as a space. This section considers recent analytical tools to examine online embodied representations. In particular, it presents how website design (Mowlabocus, 2010), online privacy (Mowlabocus, 2010; Cassidy, 2013) and the occularcentricism of the Internet govern embodied representations online.

Third, this chapter presents geographical discussions on masculinities. Scholars now recognize that there are multiple masculinities (Gorman-Murray & Hopkins, 2014). They

argue that masculinities are constructed in relation to femininities (Connell, 1995), but also in relation to a dominant hegemonic masculinity as a normative archetype (Gorman-Murray & Hopkins, 2014, p. 7). Furthermore, geographers have examined how genders are spatially constituted. McDowell (2005), for example, states that "the construction of masculinities occurs in a range of institutions and spaces from the family to the school, on the football field and its terraces, as well as in the workplace" (p. 20). My work addresses how certain digital spaces construct masculinities of MSM who use those sites.

I develop a claim in this thesis that the digital spaces that provide a space for interaction between MSM subjects both constrain and enable their subjectivities within those sites. In particular, the processes in developing representations on the personal advertisements site *Craigslist* and the online dating site *PlentyOfFish (POF)* offers limited options for presenting the subjectivities of MSM. Socio-spatial themes such as the architecture of the site, performativities of virtual bodies and surveillance contribute to the representations being (re)produced in digital spaces. This work is grounded in the queer critique partially introduced by Butler (2008:1990) and that has been taken up by Geography scholars.

Queer Theory

Queer theory emerged as an intellectual and political movement in the West during the AIDS crisis in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Queer critiques deconstruct the taken-for-granted categories and essentialisms of structuralism and modernism (Knopp, 2007). Twenty years later, *queer* remains a highly contested term (Brown *et al*, 2007). For example, Brown *et al* (2007) acknowledge that the use of *queer* varies from author to author in its global and historical context. Others, such as Browne & Nash (2010)

ultimately refuse to restrict *queer* by clearly defining the term. The individual usage and subjectivity of the term *queer* remains a part of its postmodernist beauty.

A central facet of *queer* as an identity is that it is fluid and changes in time and space. Much like the term *queer*, queer theory remains difficult to define because of its poststructuralist roots (Turner, 2000). Rather than defining what queer theory *is*, it becomes evident that it is more important, practical and consistent to its theoretical purpose to focus on what queer theory *does.* For instance, Morland & Willox (2005) state, "… queer theory politicizes sex, gender and sexuality in a way that severs the notion of identity from any stable reference points" (p. 4). Unlike hegemonic essentialist and descriptive understandings of sex, gender and sexuality, analyses through queer theory recognizes identities under these terms as subject to performative power relations. By challenging essentialist notions of sex, gender and sexuality, queer theorists ask how identities are produced and then what they do (Turner, 2000).

At its conceptual genesis as both a political movement and scholarly discourse in the early 1990s, early queer theorists drew on critical feminist theories and Foucauldian notions of power relations to challenge long standing theories of gender and sexuality (Turner, 2000). According to Butler (2008:1990), rather than being the product of an essentialist force, sex, gender and sexuality are performative. Regulatory forces of power, such as peer and self-surveillance, legibility and societal expectations (to name a few), govern gender and sexuality. Moreover, Butler (2008:1990) challenges the notion that gender is the socially constructed markers on biologically categorized sexed bodies. Rather, Butler (2008:1990) argues that gender is the mechanism through which sexed bodies are produced. As such, sexed identities of "male" and "female" are not natural

expressions of difference. Instead, repetitive social actions, such as vocabulary and practices, (re)produce bodies into normalized understandings of "male" and "female". The discursive social construction of sexed bodies, Butler (2008:1990) argues, reinforces notions of heterosexuality as being "natural"; what she terms as the *heterosexual matrix*.

The *heterosexual matrix* spawned the term *heteronormativity* to signify the performative constructs of "proper" sexed, gendered and desired bodies. Brown *et al* (2007) state, "Heteronormativity allows heterosexuality to go unmarked and unremarked upon – to be thought of as normal – by making homosexuality operate as heterosexuality's binary opposite" (p. 8). The normalizing of heterosexuality contributes to the normalizing of mutually governed sexed and gendered performances (Murphy & Spear, 2011). Scholars argue that an intersectionality of "class, race, sexuality and so on" is a key facet of the hierarchal structure of gender (Hopkins & Noble, 2009, p. 813: citing Connell, 1995).

Gendered and sexual categories normalized through such power relations create identities to which subjects cling both intentionally and unintentionally (Turner, 2000). Turner (2000) states:

> Our language, and our philosophical tradition, encourages us to believe that valid categories possess some universality. If we wish to call something a "tree," then we must be able to adduce those qualities that make any given tree sufficiently like all other trees to justify creating the category and slapping a noun on it. (p. 8)

Categories produce knowledge of "truth" which naturalizes understandings and subjectivities associated with them. These universal understandings of category-types regulate embodied representations. The hierarchal classification of categories creates conditions favourable to particular groups while penalizing the "Other" in a particular time and place. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978:1976) argues that creating the

category of sex and essentializing its notion through biology with anatomy and desire favoured heterosexuality while deeming homosexuality unnatural and inferior. Through this notion of categorizing sex, the body gains discursive meaning only after being "sexed". Butler (2008:1990) adds to this notion by stating:

> Sexuality is an historically specific organization of power, discourse, bodies, and affectivity. As such, sexuality is understood by Foucault to produce "sex" as an artificial concept which effectively extends and disguises the power relations responsible for its genesis. (p. 125)

Deconstructing seemingly stable categories like sex, gender and sexuality allows insight into the power relations responsible for aspects of our identities we take for granted. Queer theory provides the analytical tools to deconstruct seemingly stable categories to expose power relations regulating particular subjectivities.

Notions presented by Butler (2008:1990) have been taken up geographically to deconstruct socio-spatial discourses. Drawing from Butler's (2008:1990) discussion of "subversive bodily acts", Bell and Valentine (1995, p. 17), for example, discuss how public affection between same-sex couples challenges a dominant sense of place. Bell and Valentine (1995) refer to these theatric acts of resistance as *subversive spatial acts*. That is, this type of transgression exposes heteronormative dominant discourses in space. They (1995) state, "Only through the repetition of hegemonic heterosexual scripts… does space (become and) remain straight" (19). In the last thirty years, these heterosexual scripts through economic, legal and familiar institutions, have contributed to a new normative self for homosexuals and gay ghettos/villages.

Putting Queer in Space

Geographers have been employing queer theory since the 1990s to deconstruct essentialist notions of sex, gender and sexuality in the context of spatial relations (Knopp, 2007). Geographers have drawn from Butler's notion to argue that spaces are not a natural vessel, but are constituted through ongoing actions (*Brown et. al, 2007*). In considering how queer theoretical perspectives have been employed by geographers, Lawrence Knopp (2007) argues that "queer geographers these days seem to be queering just about everything from the body to the state to cyberspace" (22). The reason for this is simple; space governs sex, gender and sexuality (Brown *et al*., 2007; Knopp, 2007; Johnston & Longhurst, 2010). Power relations and infrastructure throughout space (re)produce gendered expectations. Johnston & Longhurst (2010) state:

> Sexual politics permeate all space – private and public, urban and rural, at the macro and micro level. In short, sex is everywhere and social, cultural, feminist geographers and others have begun to recognize this. Place and sexuality are mutually constituted. Sexuality has a profound effect on the way people live in, and interact with space and place. In turn, space and place affect people's sexuality. (p. 3)

Geographers have explored how we understand particular spaces as being gendered and sexualized, such as the home (Valentine, 1993; Johnston & Valentine, 1995; Elwood, 2000; Gorman-Murray, 2006), work (Valentine, 1993; McDowell, 1995; Kitchin & Lysaght, 2003; Kawale, 2004) and public space (Namaste, 1996; Browne, 2004). Since the 1990s, geographers have discussed how cultural politics and spatial visibility in gay ghettos and villages have had a significant role in the contemporary development of gay and lesbian subjectivities and vice versa; that is, these identities shape how these identities structure and organize the spaces they inhabit (see Bell & Valentine, 1995;

Nash, 2006). More recently, queer geographers have begun to deconstruct gay villages to explore how these seemingly inclusive places for non-heterosexuals favour particular performances over others (see Duggan, 2002; Nash 2006; Brown, 2008).

With the recent successes in LGBTQ politics in North America the last two decades and the gentrification of gay villages, scholars have begun to offer queer critiques of a seemingly "post-gay" era (Brown, 2006; Nash, 2013). In particular in the West, feminist and queer scholars have begun to critique the popular and acceptable identities and performances of gays and lesbians (Hopkins *et al*, 2013). Citing Duggan (2002), Nash (2013) states, "A 'sexual politics of neoliberalism' that privileges those gays and lesbians operating within gender normative, middle class, monogamous and consuming coupledom has arguably resulted in the 'homonormalization' of certain forms of gay and lesbian identities" (p. 244). Sinfield's (1998) model of the development of gay culture illustrates post-gay subjects as those whose homosexuality is related to only their sexual desires, rather than a metropolitan lifestyle or identity associated with the gay liberation movement. In his 2005 *New Republic* article "The end of gay culture: assimilation and its meaning", Sullivan (2005) states that "the distinction between gay and straight culture becomes so blurred, so fractured and so intermingled that to examine them as separate entities might not be helpful, at all" (p. 16). An issue with post-gay understandings of a gay culture is that it essentializes gay subjectivities. Sullivan's argument assumes that there was a singular gay culture. In larger urban areas, where scholarly discussions of post-gay focus, there have been a long history of competing LGBTQ subgroups with their own subjectivities and politics (see Nash, 2006).

Unlike recent queer scholarly discussions on 'post-gay', this thesis focuses on a less populated region without a centralized gay district and has been insignificant in LGBTQ politics at a national or international scale. Unlike Toronto, LGBTQ in the Niagara Region have a different geography and history compared to urban centres with gay ghettos and villages. As such, queer critiques of a post-gay era have minimal relevance to this work.

Currently, queer geographers are increasingly turning to cyberspace (Knopp, 2007). For example, the individual chapters in Pullen and Cooper's (2010) edited book, *LGBT Identity and Online New Media*, provide a comprehensive queer and feminist provides insight into the interrelation of technology, gender and sexuality. However, limited research has been done on how the Internet as a space governs sexed, gendered and sexual representations of online subjects (Downing, 2013). Cyberspace has been recognized by scholars since the mid-1990s as a utopian place of possibilities for marginalized sexual groups (see, for example, Wakeford, 1997; Bell & Kennedy, 2000; Florida, 2002; and Gross, 2003). The perceptions of heterogeneity, temporariness and anonymity that online spaces offer are appealing for marginalized groups (Knopp, 2007). Other than Pullen & Cooper's (2010) feminist collection of chapters about identity on social networking sites, only a handful scholars, other than sexual health researchers have explored the Internet and the ways in which social media govern LGBTQ representations (Cassidy, 2013; Downing, 2013).

For this thesis, I draw on Brown *et al.*'s (2007) consideration of queer theory in that we need to focus on what queer theory does. First, queer theory challenges seemingly stable spatial representations of sex, gender and sexuality. Turner (2000) states that anxieties

around gender and sexuality "surface around queers, queerness, and the work of queer theorists" (5). Second, queer theory can expose spatial and temporal governance of subjectivities. Queer theory, in the examination of *subversive spatial acts* (Bell and Valentine, 1995), provides insight into the hegemonic heterosexual scripts informing and governing spaces. In considering virtual spaces, queer theory can be used to examine how particular subjectivities of masculinity are governed through online interactions and, how, in turn, these sites are constituted through social actions.

A limitation to queer theory presides within its post-structuralist rejection of static labels of identities and subjectivities. This limitation becomes problematic when expressing power relations governing the subjectivities of identity categories within a particular space and time. Adams (2007) states:

> Rejecting outright subject positions that possess a classifiable interior in the first instance, but advancing an analysis of subject positions with a classifiable interior in the second instance, this formulation leaves queer theory between a rock and a hard place, epistemologically schizophrenic and methodologically untenable. (p. 38)

In other words, denouncing stable labels and identities while expressing power structures constituting the subject is internally inconsistent and flawed. In order to communicate knowledge on these power relations, the author must work within the discursive identity categories being deconstructed. Expressing identity categories that, according to queer theory, are unstable, fluid social constructions contradicts the queer theoretical basis. However, it remains necessary to express identity categories in order to expose and illustrate the power relations governing subjectivities within a given space and time.

Conceptualizing Virtual Spaces

In order to explore the way the Internet and social media users govern embodied representations within virtual spaces, I must first conceptualize the Internet used in this work must first be discussed. August 6, 1991 marked the dawn of a new era with the launch of the World Wide Web (Chalmers, 2009). Cybergeographer Mark Graham states (2013), "[t]he internet has fundamentally transformed everyday life for over two billion people around the world" (p. 177). Metaphors used to discuss the internet are riddled with geographic labels. Kinsley (2013 quoting Graham, 1998, p. 165) states, "[t]he discourses of the internet are stabilised through the 'powerful role of spatial and territorial metaphors'" (p. 545). Terms like *cyberspace* and *website* exemplify the spatial and territorial metaphors associated with the Internet. Graham (2013) states, "metaphors reflect, embody and, most importantly, reproduce ways of thinking about and conceptualising our world" (p. 178). The spatial and territorial metaphors associated with the Internet presents it as a unique space separate from physical space (Graham, 2013).

Hybrid spaces dominate the spatial conceptualization of the Internet among geographers (Graham, 2013). de Souza e Silva (2006) defines hybrid space as:

> … mobile spaces, created by the constant movement of users who carry portable devices continuously connected to the Internet and to other users… The possibility of an "always-on" connection when one moves through a city transforms our experience of space by enfolding remote contexts inside the present context. This connection is related both to social interactions and to connections to the information space, that is, the Internet. (p. 262)

In a hybrid space, material space is layered with digital information with which we interact through our ICTs during our daily lives. The notion of a hybrid space moves away from the dichotomous understanding of material and digital space. In many

conceptualizations, however, this means viewing the Internet as complementary information, or a digital layer, for material space. These conceptualizations may be why, as Downing (2013) asserts, geographers rarely explore how material spaces and interactions constitute virtual spaces on the Internet. This is not to say that hybrid space makes it impossible for scholars to examine how material spaces constitute virtual spaces. Donna Haraway's (1991) notion of the cyborg, for example, breaks down the dualisms of the material and machine and describes how these two subjects are mutually constitutive. Haraway (1991) argues:

> Communications technologies and biotechnologies are the crucial tools recrafting our bodies. These tools embody and enforce new social relations for women worldwide. Technologies and scientific discourses can be partially understood as formalizations, i.e. as frozen moments, of the fluid social interactions constituting them, but they should also be viewed as instruments for enforcing meanings. The boundary is permeable between tool and myth, instrument and concept, historical systems of social relations and historical anatomies of possible bodies, including objects of knowledge. Indeed, myth and tool mutually constitute each other. (p. 164)

As is evident from Haraway's argument, communication technologies such as the Internet both informs bodies and is informed by them. These technologies, as Haraway (1991) argues, break down traditional boundaries between human and machine. With more recent technological advances, Harraway's argument can extend to the traditional boundaries of material and virtual spaces.

Website Architecture

While hybrid spaces are useful in recognizing the influence that ICTs have on Western modern society and the increased mobility of technologies, previous analyses are limited in suggesting how material spatial relations govern online representations of subjects. In his interdisciplinary book *Gaydar Culture: Gay Men, Technology and Embodiment in the*

Digital Age, Mowlabocus (2010) proposes examining the "architecture" of websites (i.e. the layout and function of websites) to explore the online embodied representations of MSM.

Website design may consist of website policies and how subjects interact or input information onto the website. For example, social media sites may allow subjects to input information through free-form which the subject has a blank field to provide information about themselves. However, social media sites may also be more limiting and force subjects to select pre-existing terms from a drop-down menu. As previous research on sites with either option has found MSM are restricted to choosing from among normalizing discourses. Gudelunas (2005) found that MSM consistently provided similar information in free-form fields in online personal advertisements on *PlanetOut*. Additionally, Mowlabocus (2010) found that normative discourses informed representations of gay men online. On *Gaydar*, on which subjects select options from a drop-down menu, Cassidy (2013) found that gay men were forced to select options with which they do not necessarily identify (p. 104). This becomes problematic when a website only provides limited selections in terms of gender (e.g. man or woman) or sexuality (i.e. gay or straight). How the website is designed for subjects to input information, then, constrains the gendered and sexual representations of the self (re)produced online.

The target audience and presentation of websites also limits the gendered and sexual representations of subjects occupying those virtual spaces. Cassidy (2013) found that the hypersexualized brand of *Gaydar,* through the use of image-based advertisements and banners on the website, governs the purpose of that particular site, which is to find other

men for sexual intent. In comparison to *Gaydar*, Cassidy (2013) found that the casual friends-based social media site of *Facebook* consisted of gay men using the site to network with others for platonic purposes. In addition to the differences of purpose between the two sites, it should be noted that *Gaydar* is designed specifically for MSM, whereas *Facebook* is designed for anyone with access to the site within the terms and conditions of the site.

Online Privacy

Notions of privacy also must be included with the architecture of digital spaces. Website accessibility and privacy controls contribute to the architecture of the website. Privacy is also a central governing force online. Mowlabocus (2010) argues that online gay male culture is intertwined with a complex relationship of surveillance and privacy. According to Mowlabocus (2010), a history of surveillance of a broader gay culture contributes to the representations online. However, this claim can easily be extended to anyone. For example, Foucault (1975) argues that surveillance (including self-surveillance) operates as a mechanism of disciplinary power governing bodies. Disciplinary power governs online spaces in a fashion similar to material spaces. Cassidy (2013) argues that gay men mediate online privacy to avoid unwanted recognition through their representations online. Some social media sites, like *Facebook*, offer users the ability to alter their privacy settings to allow only certain people to view the content on their site. However, other sites, such as those examined in this work, do not offer those same capabilities. For sites that do not offer privacy controls and are completely accessible to the general public online, mediation of privacy online includes self-censorship. For example, Cassidy (2013) found that gay men would exclude certain information on their online profiles to

prevent being unwantedly "outed" or recognized. Self-censorship of online bodies is controlled through the use of text and images. This form of self-censorship is a form of self-governance of digital embodied representations.

Occularcentric Bodies Online

Unlike material bodies, digital embodiment is almost entirely visual. Online presentations through text, audio and video as well as profile images and webcams (re)produce visual virtual bodies (Downing, 2013). According to Rose (2014), "The visual is a very significant aspect of contemporary social practices…" (p. 27). This is particularly evident with MSM online. Scholars consistently find that MSM online focus more on physical characteristics than other groups (see, for example Gudelunas, 2005; Whitesel, 2010). According to Mowlabocus (2010), emphasis on physical markers through the employment of visuals is a significant cultural artefact of MSM online. The heavy influence of gay publications on a broader gay culture (re)produces a highly materialistic and hypersexual desire amongst MSM (Mowlabocus, 2010). In other words, gay male popular culture emphasizes shallow embodied performativities of desirable, sexualized gay male bodies.

Research consistently finds that personal advertisements posted by MSM emphasize the material and sexual desire more than women and heterosexuals (Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Gonzalez & Meyers, 1993; Hatala & Prehodka, 1996; Bartholome et al., 2000; Gudelunas, 2005). These materialistic and hypersexual representations through visuals (and text) online express the "pornographic remediation of the gay male body" (Mowlabocus, 2010, p. 58). This, as described by Mowlabocus (2010, p.58), is the

presentation of gay male bodies mainly as objects of a homoerotic gaze. Pro-gay-porn scholars argue that gay pornography serves a variety of functions including entertainment, education, validation and identification (see Clarke, 1991; Patton, 1991; Williams, 1992; MacNair, 1996; see also Mowlabocus, 2010). Additionally, scholars argue that the prominence of gay pornography and materialism is a symptom of the rise of a neoliberal gay culture in the 1980s (D'Emilio, 1992); now understood as a neoliberal post-gay culture. As such, the visual culture of the Internet and the broader gay popular culture reinforce materialistic and hypersexualized representations of MSM online.

Masculinities

Considering that this thesis examines self-representations of men, I must first explore how the literature engages masculinities, online embodiment of gender performativities and intersectionality of masculinities. Gorman-Murray (2008: citing Duncan, 1996; McDowell 1999) states, "Geographers have added to critical men's studies by demonstrating that the construction of gendered identities and power relations is spatialized" (p. 368). This addition to critical men's studies asserts that understandings of masculinity are related to both space and time.

Since the prolific work of R.W. Connell (1995), scholars have shifted away from understanding masculinity as a homogenous essentialised identity. Connell (1995) convincingly describes the notion of *hegemonic masculinity* which is defined in contrast to femininity and in relations of *dominance* to *subordinate*, *complicit* and *marginal* masculinities and determined by an intersectionality of markers in terms of class, race, sexuality, and so on. Scholars today argue that there is "a wider range of masculine

identities that are hierarchically structured around hegemonic understandings" (van Hoven & Horschelmann 2005, p. 8). Van Hoven & Horschelmann (2005) argue that hegemonic understandings of masculinity are governed through cultural practices and values particular to place and context. This spatial and temporal understanding of hegemonic masculinity allows geographers to examine spatial relations governing masculinities within the hierarchal structure of representations.

Examining representations of desirable men in recent popular culture provides insight into the changing definition of hegemonic masculinity. For the purpose of this thesis, hegemonic masculine representations is of men who are physically fit with a muscled body, white, has a shadow of facial hair, kempt-hairstyle, affluent and mildly "edgy". This representation is embodied by the tabloid *People Magazine* in their selection of "Sexiest Man of the Year". In 2013, the year this research was conducted, *People* chose rock star Adam Levine of Maroon 5 was selected as the "sexiest man alive" (see Figure I). The cover contends that Levine is "Cool, Confident, [and] Seductive" (People, 2013, Cover). This description of hegemonic masculinity is dominant in younger, urban post-gay subjectivities (Nash, 2013). For example, the online retailer *Marek + Richard*, which markets clothing to MSM, recently released a tank-top which reads "No Fats, No Fems"; a popular phrase on *Gaydar* (see Figure II) (Rodriguez, 2016). Sánchez *et al.* (2009) found by conducting an online survey that there are gay cultural expectations of masculinity ideology in America for MSM to embody. Research has found that MSM make significant attempts, more so than heterosexual men, to achieve this intersection of masculinity (Sánchez *et al.*, 2009; Varangis *et al*., 2012).

Figure I. People's Magazine, 2013 Sexiest Man Alive! Cover

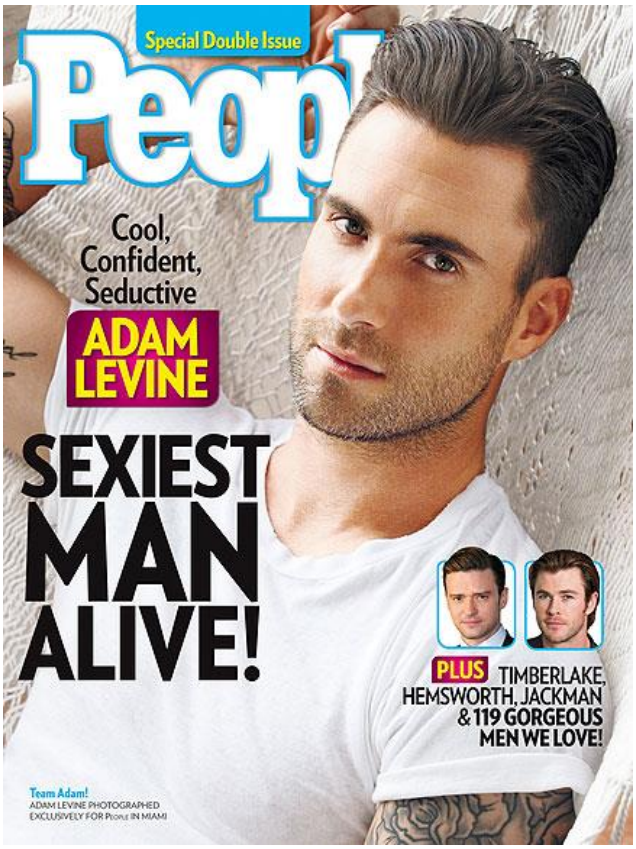

Figure I is the 2013 cover of PEOPLE Magazine announcing Maroon 5 vocalist as the "Sexiest Man Alive!" As is evident from the cover, the most desired masculine representation (i.e. hegemonic masculinity) demonstrates a physically fit, lean, chiselled man with shadowed facial hair and 'edge' with tattoos and being affiliated with a rock music group. Retrieved from http://www.people.com/people/package/gallery/0,,20957461_20154495_30229116,00.html.

Figure II. Marek + Richard "No Fats No Fems Low Arm Tank"

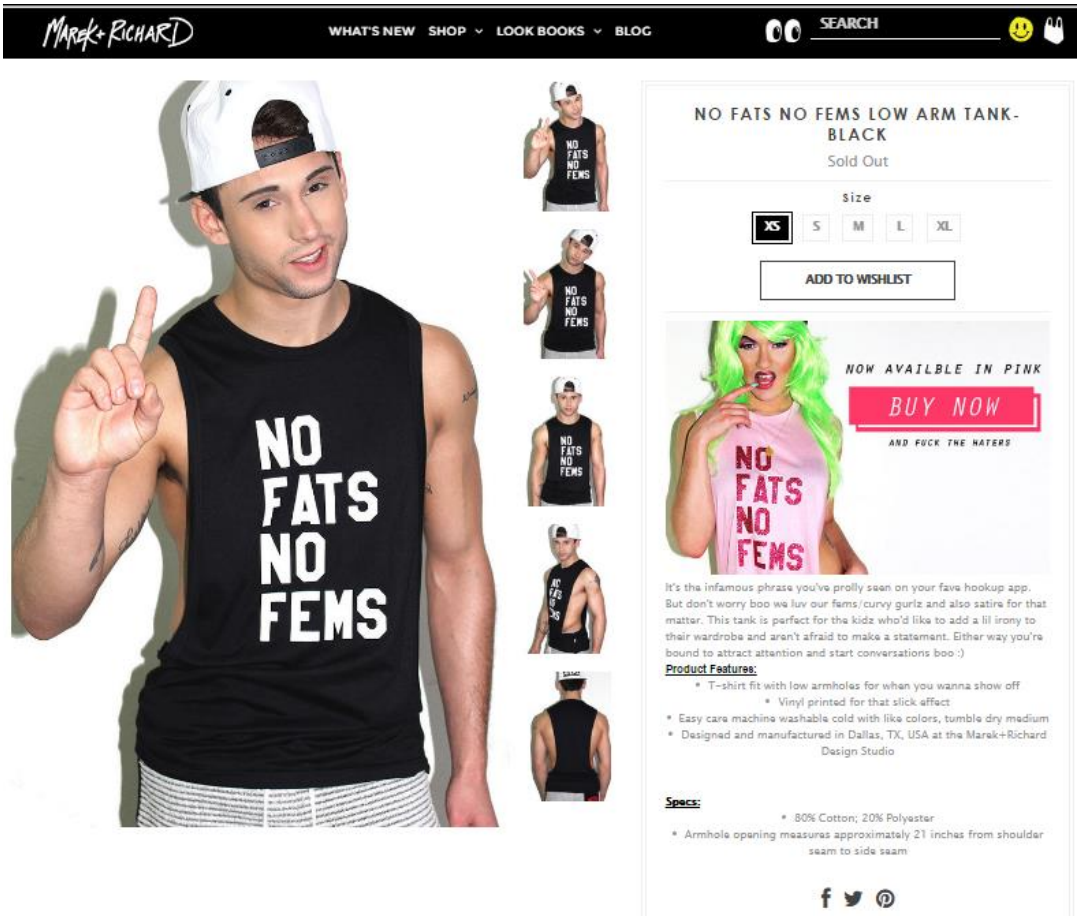

Figure II is an online advertisement for a tank-top marketed towards MSM by *Marek + Richard*. The tank-top contains a popular phrase used by MSM on MSM oriented social media sites like *Gaydar* (Rodriguez, 2016). The phrase "No Fats No Fems" is an expression of desire towards fit, masculine men such as the model displayed in the advertisement. Retrieved from https://marekrichard.com/products/vd16nofatslatnk?variant=14851328963.

Critical men's research within geography has added to the ways in which geography contributes to the constitution of masculine representations. Within social and cultural geographies, the body has become a significant space governing gender. Though not a geographer, Butler (2008:1990) argues that performativity is produced "through the stylisation of the body" (p. 140). Adding a geographic component to "the stylisation of

the body", Oswin (2008) argues that this production of performativity results in specific embodied expressions in different socio-spatial contexts. In like manner, Gorman-Murray (2013) states that "poststructural feminist geographers have productively combined social and cultural concepts about the body with geographical theory to demonstrate how bodies and spaces are mutually constitutive" (p. 138). Much of the geographic work exploring the mutual constitution of men's bodies and spaces focuses on public urban arenas such as work (McDowell, 2003; 2005; 2009), bars, sporting fields and public recreational sites (Nayak, 2003; Hall, 2005; Waitt, 2006). Other multidisciplinary work from outside of geography has examined the online embodiment of men (see, for example Mowlabocus, 2010; Cassidy, 2013).

The geographic discussions on performativity and embodiment regarding material bodies are relevant to the Internet. Socio-spatial power relations regulate digital representations of bodies just as they do in material spaces. Lazzara (2010) argues that recent scholarly interest in the effects of online social media "expos[es] the complex performative aspects of online identity" (p. 60). McKie *et al.* (2015) found that social media sites that provide a space for MSM in Canada to communicate with other MSM facilitate the development of their gender and sexual identities. Discourses embedded in the designs of websites and social interactions between MSM reaffirm particular subjectivities. For example, on social media and other online networks, identifying terms like "twink"[4] employed by subjects (re)produces specific embodied performativities and a set of sexual desires (Downing, 2013). The regulated repetitive stylizations of virtual bodies through the use of images and text produce particular socio-spatial subjectivities online.

[4] A *twink* is an effeminate, young MSM typically with no body hair and a thinner or slightly muscular physique.

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the theoretical analytics that I use to express my claim that digital sites govern MSM subjectivities online. I began by presenting a broad overview of queer theory and what a queer critique *does*. Queer critiques deconstruct seemingly stable identities of sex, gender and sexuality to explore underlying power relations governing embodied representations and desire (Butler, 2008:1990; Brown *et al*., 2007). Queer critiques have expanded beyond analyzing psychoanalysis and language to deconstructing discursive representations in daily lives. Geographers have taken up queer theory to deconstruct the spatial relations in almost all facets of life (Knopp, 2007). Increasingly, geographers are beginning to apply queer critiques to the Internet (Knopp, 2007).

In almost twenty-five years, the Internet has exploded into being one of the most significant technological advances of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Scholars have long argued that, for marginalized groups like MSM, the Internet offers new virtual spaces of possibilities that heteronormative physical space restricts (see, for example, Wakeford, 1997; Bell & Kennedy, 2000; Florida, 2002; and Gross, 2003). With the advancement of Internet technologies, the ways in which subjects interact with virtual and material spaces have altered.

Previous analyses of the Internet make it difficult to examine how digital spaces govern the subjectivities of those occupying these spaces. As such, this work analyzes the processes in producing representations online govern subjectivities. In particular, I look at the architecture of the website (Mowlabocus, 2010) and online privacy (Mowlabocus, 2010; Cassidy, 2013). I assert that analyzing these mechanisms provide insight into the

forces of power governing online subjectivities. Additionally, careful attention needs to be given to the occularcentricism of the Internet. Unlike presentations in material space, which includes a multisensory interaction, presentations online are predominately visual. Discursive images contribute to an understanding of particular MSM subjectivities (Mowlabocus, 2010).

It is becoming readily understood that there are countless masculinities (Gorman-Murray & Hopkins, 2015). The intersection of markers including, but not limited to, physique, class, race, age, and sexuality constitute a stratified subjectivity of masculinity against an unattainable hegemonic masculine identity (Gorman-Murray, 2013; Gorman-Murray & Hopkins, 2015; see also Connell, 1995). Masculinities are also particular to specific places and times. Recently, urban MSM in their twenties and thirties may identify with hypermasculine subjectivities (Sullivan, 2005; Nash, 2013). However, queer geographical critiques of gendered subjectivities have primarily focused on large urban areas with centralized gay districts and a history of LGBTQ politics. This thesis seeks to address the often ignored knowledge of smaller regions without a centralized gay district and has a relatively insignificant LGBTQ political history. This thesis also seeks to address the burgeoning queer scholarship on the Internet.

Through this analysis with a queer critique, I claim that virtual sites govern the subjectivities of MSM occupying those sites. The argument presented here is that discursive power is embedded in the design and organization of virtual sites regulating performative representations of the virtual body of MSM in the sites examined. As I shall demonstrate discursive power embedded in the architecture of websites and the

performativities of virtual bodies regulates representations based on perceived acceptability of a wider population in the accessible sites examined in this work.

Chapter III: Methodology

Research Questions and Purpose

With limited material space for men who have sex with men (MSM) to connect with each other in the Niagara Region, this research turns to the Internet to seek how power structures produce representations of MSM on two particular sites. In order to explore how digital spaces govern MSM subjectivities, I collected two hundred fifty personal advertisements published on *Craigslist* and one hundred dating profiles produced on the dating website *PlentyOfFish* (*POF*). Each personal advertisement and dating profile represents a subject who claims to reside in the Niagara Region.

To demonstrate my argument that embedded heteronormative discourses in virtual spaces regulate the self-representations of MSM, I conducted a Foucauldian discourse analysis on the text and images produced by subjects for their profiles. I begin the chapter by describing a Foucauldian discourse analysis. In the second section, I explore the relationship between power relations embedded in digital sites and the digital embodied representations of gender and sexuality. The second part of this chapter explains the data collection process. I also explain the sites of study from which these personal advertisements and dating profiles have been collected. In this section, I discuss how themes emerge as performative representations of MSM in these virtual sites. The final section of this chapter outlines the limitations to my research. The Internet remains a vast, largely untapped source of information for scholars to explore (Hine, 2013). In addition to presenting the research conducted for this thesis, this chapter seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussion of geographic research on virtual spaces.

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

Online personal advertisements and dating sites provide subjects with the virtual space to (re)produce subjectivities through text and images. The aim of this section is to demonstrate that a Foucauldian discourse analysis of personal profiles can shed light on the governance of representations of gender and sexuality. Social scientists, largely media studies scholars, exploring LGBTQ embodied representations online have found personal advertisements and dating profiles to be rich sources of data. Gudelunas (2005), for example, explores the differences between small town and large town representations of gay men in personal advertisements. In a more general research on the Internet and young MSM, McKie *et al.* (2015) found that the Internet, naming the two sites of study in this research, provides a positive impact on young gay men's dating and relationships in Canada. Moreover, Gnilka and Dew (2009) state that gay men are the largest group of digital technology users and are most affected by virtual technology. In short, online personal advertisements and dating sites comprise a rich body upon which to draw for this research.

Subjects (re)producing embodied representations online to seek a mate present legible, occularcentric virtual bodies to appeal to others within that site.[5] Research on personal advertisements and online dating consistently find that subjects rely on stereotypical, or normative, gendered discourses to represent themselves and their desired mate(s) (see Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Gonzalez & Meyers, 1993; Hatala & Prehodka, 1996; Bartholome *et al.*, 2000; Gudelunas, 2005). Scholars have found in personal advertisements and online dating of men seeking men that subjects tend to emphasize physical characteristics

[5] "Mate" is used in this work as a general term for the man/men that the advertiser is seeking.

of themselves and of the desired potential partner (Gudelunas, 2005; Whitesel, 2010). This (re)production of virtual bodies is possible for subjects through the employment of text and images.

Because my research is concerned with performative representations of virtual bodies of MSM, the conceptual framework for this thesis is firmly planted in queer theory. To remain consistent with the post-structuralist ontology and epistemology of queer theory, I am employing a Foucauldian discourse analysis on the text and images of personal advertisements and dating profiles. Scholars have long built upon the provocative work of Foucault in developing ways to penetrate discourse (Rose, 2012). Valentine (2001) defines discourse as a "set of connected ideas, meanings and practices through which we talk about or represent the world" (p. 342). Discourse helps produce categories, facts and objects that they seek to describe (Foucault, 1972). Furthermore, it is "the way language works to organize fields of knowledge and practice" (Tonkiss, 2012, 406). Foucault and scholars who have taken up his philosophies extend the definition of discourse to materials and images. For example, Butler (2008:1990) argues that discourse produces conditions for the gendered embodiment of personhood. The regulated repetitive stylization of the body (re)produces a particular knowledge regarding gender and sexuality as an ongoing process.

As virtual bodies are (re)produced through text and images, special consideration is needed for the ways in which images act as discourse. Rose (2012) argues that, like language, "images construct specific views of the social world" (195). Within the occularcentric traditions of the West, and indeed in much of the history of geographies, images produce, and are the products of, discursive power (Rogoff, 2000). For example,

Mulvey (1989) argues that phallocentric visuality governs the "woman as image, man the bearer of the look" (19). The fictions displayed in an image constitute a regime of truth (re)produced by the image maker. Through examination of Western art, Foucault (1972) argued that a painting "is a discursive practice that is embodied in techniques and effects" (194). Discourse is present in the production of images in modalities such as, but not limited to the angle, lighting, focus, and other things that outside of the field of vision (i.e. objects left out of the image) (Rose, 2012).

Considering that the purpose of personal advertisements and online dating is to attract a desired mate, discourses embedded in the representations of subjects online attempt to (re)produce desirable bodies. Through modalities, such as those previously listed, producers encode certain meanings into images. According to Rose (2014):

> … meaning is communicated by what is done with images, in specific moments of interpretation and evocation… images are treated not as if they carry inherent meaning, but rather as objects which can be deployed in very different ways… [and] visual materials are made to make sense depending on the context of their use. (p. 38)

The meanings connected together through interpretation by both the producer and the audience constructs a discursive formation. Analyzing the discursive formation of text and images, therefore, provides a useful tool in this research for "identifying key themes and arguments, looking for association and variation… and paying attention to emphasis and silences" (Tonkiss, 2012, 412-413). In other words, using a Foucauldian discourse analysis to discover the intersection of power and knowledge in the text and images employed in the virtual representations is a useful tool to gain insight into the spatial power relations governing these performative (virtual) bodies.

Data Sources and Collection – Sites of Study

The two websites explored in this thesis are the personal advertisement website *Craigslist* and the online dating website *POF*. Both websites offer the ability for men to seek other men for sexual encounters, friendship or dating. As Downing (2013) states, "… there has been little research exploring the recent growth and uses of social networking websites which have been designed for non-heterosexual users" (45). Mowlabocus (2010), for example, found that homonormative discourses governed the representations of gay men online; even on barebacking sites (a sexual behaviour that Mowlabocus states is at odds with homonormativity). Additionally, Cassidy (2013) found that homonormative representations of men in commercial advertisements posted on *Gaydar* attempted to produce normative subjectivities of desire. Although the two sites explored in this research offer the ability for non-heterosexuals to connect, they are not designed specifically for non-heterosexuals like *Gaydar*, *Grindr* or *Squirt*. While the sites of study in this work provide a virtual space for MSM to connect, they are also used by heterosexual men and women. Both heterosexual and homosexual practices constituting the sites govern particular representations within the sites of study in this work.

Craigslist

Established in 1995 in San Francisco, *Craigslist* has grown to have more than seven hundred local sites in seventy countries (*Craigslist*, 2015). According to Daniel Farr (2010), in 2009, *Craigslist* was the "eighth largest English-language website globally" (86). Currently, the website gets more than 50 billion page views per month and

"*Craigslist* users will post well over 80 million classified ads each month (including reposts and renewals)" (*Craigslist*, 2015).

The local *Craigslist* site lists as "Niagara Region". The community moderated and largely free local sites offers subjects the ability to sell, seek or discuss anything from "jobs, housing, goods, services, romance, local activities, advice – just about anything really" (Craigslist, 2015, factsheet). Subjects are able to post, read and respond to any personal advertisement on *Craigslist* for free and without a free account. As such, the website is highly accessible and available for the general public with access to and knowledge of the Internet.

The layout of *Craigslist* is very basic. Advertisements are divided by numerous headings and subheadings. There are several subheadings under the personal heading (Figure III). They include *strictly platonic*, *women seeking women*, *women seeking men*, *men seeking women*, *men seeking men*, *misc romance*, *casual encounters*, *missed connections*, and *rants and raves*. Further categories, such as *men seeking men and women* (i.e. a couple), or a combination of categories can be searched once selecting one of the subheadings. Once the link to the personal advertisements is clicked, personal advertisements are listed by the date they were posted, the title of the advertisement which also serves as the link to the advertisement, the poster's age (if supplied), the word "pic" if there is an image in the advertisement and the location of the poster (if supplied). The personal advertisement itself is basic text, possibly a picture if the poster included one and a "reply" button. The "reply" button allows the subject viewing the advertisement to reply by e-mail through the website or by webmail (e.g. *Gmail*, *Hotmail* or *Microsoft Live*). All responses go directly to the e-mail the poster provided to *Craigslist* when posting the advertisement.

The simplicity of *Craigslist* makes it relatively easy even for a novice to connect with others. It also makes the site an easy and efficient space to collect data on MSM in Niagara connecting online.

Figure III. Niagara Region's *Craigslist* homepage

Figure III is a screenshot of the homepage of the local Niagara region *Craigslist* site. This screenshot displays the simplicity of the layout of the website. Retrieved from http://niagara.craigslist.ca/.

PlentyOfFish

Founded in Vancouver in 2003, *POF* has grown to be the world's largest dating website (la Rose, 2015). In March 2015, the dating website surpassed one hundred million users

worldwide (la Rose, 2015) and gets fifty-five thousand new signups every day (*POF* Press, 2015). On its homepage, *POF* boasts that the site "has more dates, more relationships, more visits than any other dating site" (*PlentyofFish*, 2015, para 1). The website is available worldwide in five languages (la Rose, 2015). Moreover, it is one of the few dating websites that allows subjects on the site to message each other for free (*PlentyofFish*, 2015).

Along with being a free-to-use dating website, profiles are completely accessible by the public. At the time the data was collected, the site's homepage included thumbnails of images of women linking to their profiles; though subsequent visits to the site since the data was collected also revealed men's ads on the homepage. These profiles, among others which may be browsed, are accessible without signing up. The only aspect of the website which is inaccessible to subjects without a profile on *POF* is the ability to *Message* or *Chat* with others on the site. In order to create a profile on *POF*, a subject must register with an e-mail address and password.

At the time this research was conducted, in order to publish a profile, all mandatory fields must be filled. These include a username, a headline, gender, age, country, location, ethnicity, body type, smoking status, profession, intent (e.g. relationship, friends, hang out, etc.), education, personality, an About Me section and the desired gender.[6] Other optional categories, such as profession and income, just to name a few, are also available. *POF* also offers the option to include pictures. The content provided during the production of a dating profile consists of a headline, username and mandatory

[6] Since this research was conducted, POF changed its options in the drop-down menus to include "Prefer not to say".

information at the top of the profile, followed by the images below and the optional and *About Me* at the bottom of the profile. Most of the categories only allow subjects to choose their selection from a drop-down menu. Drop-down menus force subjects to conform to the normative discourses of the website (see Cassidy, 2013). An example of this conformity is evident when selecting one's gender to produce a profile; only *man* and *woman* are available options. The drop-down menus also limit the choices of potential partners in similar fashion. The limited number of options that subjects can choose to self-identify as and for which to seek on *POF* produces normative subjects represented in the dating profiles.

To connect with someone on *POF*, the website offers the option to send the desired other a message or to *Chat* with them (acts as an instant messaging service on the website).[7] Be it for liability purposes or an attempt to retain users of the site, *POF* bans subjects from posting phone numbers, e-mail addresses, website links and any other information which may allow subjects to contact each other outside of the website.

Searching profiles on *POF* is possible by selecting the tab at the top of the screen entitled *Search.* This allows subjects to search others between a selected age range, distance from a postal code and other categories provided to *POF* to produce a profile. Users are listed in chronological order from the last time the user was online with their profile picture being the main focus accompanied by the headline, city, *About me*, username, age, what

[7] *Chat* was available at the time the research was conducted. The website has since been changed. Instead of *Chat*, the website allows subjects to send a *Quick Message* which is less formal than a *Message*.

type of relationship they are seeking, their education and their online status.[8] The extent of information needed to produce a profile on *POF* and its accessibility makes it a rich source of data.

Sampling

My data were from analyzed personal advertisements published on *Craigslist* and dating profiles produced on *POF*. On *Craigslist*, I collected ten published personal advertisements every day from September 7, 2013 to October 1, 2013 inclusive. In total, I collected two hundred fifty personal advertisements on *Craigslist*. The personal advertisements collected were published the day that they were collected. Personal advertisements were collected around midnight so that I had access to all personal advertisements published on that date. By two hundred fifty personal advertisements, the data was becoming redundant. This suggests that data saturation had been met (see Josselson & Lieblich, 2003).

These two hundred fifty personal advertisements were published under the *men seeking men* section of *Craigslist* which included advertisements for *men seeking men* and misplaced *rants and raves* included in the *men seeking men* section of the site. Considering that approximately fifty personal advertisements were published daily in Niagara by men seeking men, a systematic sample with a sampling fraction of five was used to decide which personal advertisements to collect. In other words, I collected the first personal advertisement and every fifth one thereafter. In the rare case of there being

[8] Online status refers to whether or not the user was logged into the profile at a given time. If a person was online, that is to say that they were logged in on their profile, green text would read "Online" below their display picture.

less than forty-six personal advertisements, the process would begin again starting with the second personal advertisement published until ten personal advertisements were collected. Due to the design of *Craigslist,* it is difficult to determine if each personal advertisement was published by a unique user. As such, issues of duplication on this particular site are not considered. While I made my presence known by posting personal advertisements and e-mailing subjects who posted personal advertisements on *Craigslist* seeking participants for interviews, I did not participate in the ongoing socialization between subjects that connect on the site.

In like manner, I collected information published in dating profiles on *POF*. I collected five dating profiles a day from September 7 to September 26, 2013 inclusive. In total, one hundred dating profiles were collected. Since it is impossible to search dating profiles within certain cities or regions on *POF*, I searched using the tools provided on the website. I searched with Brock University's postal code and all profiles of men seeking men published within fifty kilometres of that postal code. Distance from the postal code used is selected from a drop-down menu. I used fifty kilometres as it is the best option to include the entire Niagara Region while limiting data from outside the region. This selection, in fact, produced results of profiles outside of the Niagara Region, but I did not add them to the sample. Results of the search are displayed in chronological order based on the last time the subject logged into the site. In order to gain a representative sample of the population currently using the site, I employed a systematic sample with a sampling fraction of ten. Due to the layout of the website with profiles being listed by "last online", a larger interval for the sampling fraction was used to collect dating profiles. No profile was collected more than once. Near the end of collecting the data on POF, it became

more difficult to select five profiles that had not been collected already. If a profile was systemically selected and had already been observed, I would continue to the next tenth dating profile until five had been dating profiles had been collected. Since it became more difficult to find the necessary number of dating profiles, data saturation became evident after observing one hundred dating profiles (see Josselson and Lieblich, 2003).

It is important to note that all information collected is accessible to the public without registering for a website. I registered on *POF* in order to communicate with MSM on the dating site to seek participants for interviews. Since all of the information gathered through observation is publicly available, there are no ethical considerations with the data collected this way. With that in mind, I was concerned over the privacy of the subjects. Given that this research lies outside of the original space where they appeared, I am not reproducing in this thesis and I make every reasonable effort to protect the identities of subjects.

Codes and Themes

Since geographical contributions on how virtual sites govern representations of gender and sexuality are limited, I lacked a conceptual toolkit to guide this research. However, drawing from my theoretical framework and literature review, I was able to identify five common themes between the two sites of study as they relate to an intersectionality of masculinities: *physique*, *age*, *race*, *health status*, and *relationship-type desire* (i.e. seeking sex, relationship, friendship, etc.). As Gorman-Murray & Hopkins (2014) argue, masculinities are stratified in terms of an intersection of performative categories, such as the five themes in this analysis. In addition to the five common themes between the two

sites, a sixth theme emerged from the data: *privacy*. Cassidy (2013) argues that gay men mediate privacy when (re)producing representations of themselves on social media. This is evident throughout the data collected in this research.

While these six themes are present throughout the data from both sites, other themes emerged through the analysis. Examples include technological literacy, devices used to produce representations and access the sites, and how subjects intend to use material spaces to connect with those they meet online. However, these themes are site specific. In particular, due to the extent of information required to produce a dating profile on *POF*, more detailed information is provided on that site. While these additional themes proved to provide a broader insight into the representations produced on that virtual site, they failed to fit within my theoretical framework. As such, this analysis is not intended to be a definitive account on how virtual sites govern performative representations of gender and sexuality. Rather, this analysis is intended to provide initial insight into how these particular websites regulate the representations of MSM when the samples were collected to provide a geographical methodology for online research.

Research Limitations

Since my analysis focuses on marginalized men, special methodological questions need to be raised. Meth & McClymont (2009) state, "The subject matter of masculinity research considered by Geographers (and others) is now very extensive, however, there is a lack of explicit engagement with questions of methodology…" (p. 909). Meth & McClymont's (2009) response to this methodological gap is to combine multiple qualitative methods to increase "[t]he capacity of positionalities to be renegotiated and

for different spaces of disclosure to be created…" (p. 922). Since gendered representations are understood to be fluid in space and time, I intended to conduct multiple qualitative methods to recognize the differing identities. In addition to analyzing personal advertisements and dating profiles, I intended to conduct semi-structured interviews with subjects whom occupy these virtual spaces. Unfortunately, my attempts to procure participants proved to be fruitless. Grov *et al.* (2014) state that participation through online methods is generally lower than through traditional methods and sampling. Without interviews, the data is limited to the publicly posted representations of subjects in both sites. The current methodology provides no insight into private discussions between subjects, the agency in choosing sites to connect and the ongoing process of the (re)production of representations within these sites. This methodology also limits insight into the affect of the subjects within the sample collected.

Secondly, this research was conducted in 2013. Digital technologies and websites are constantly changing. Given this, since the research was conducted, website design, website censorship, technology and how people interact with digital technologies have changed. Changes in digital technologies and website designs makes data dated or obsolete (Cassidy, 2013). For example, while collecting data on *POF*, certain messaging functions were altered by the website. Additionally, both sites examined have changed some of the functionality of the website, including the options available in drop-down menus and POF has eased the censorship of what might be considered vulgar language. As such, when conducting research on digital spaces, the data collected is specific only to the time that is collected. Undoubtedly, due to website design changes, samples collected now would differ from the samples collected in this research.

Finally, while examining the spatial governance of representations of gender and sexuality, this research considers a broad population of MSM. Focus on a particular subgroup of MSM may provide greater insight into the governance of performative representations of gender and sexuality of that particular group. Additionally, I have only examined one particular group: MSM. Of course, personal advertisements and online dating are actively used by a broad spectrum of subject types, too. Considering that gay men experience a history of surveillance which regulates their online interactions (Mowlabocus, 2010; Cassidy, 2013), interesting results may be found examining other groups' online spatial subjectivities.

Advantages of Online Research

There are some advantages of conducting research on the Internet. As previously indicated, MSM are some of the most active users of online spaces (Gnilka & Dew, 2009). Gordon (2013), for example, found that MSM spend more time online than their heterosexual counterparts. In addition to the influence the Internet has on MSM behaviour, it also acts as a space to connect to hidden populations. For areas with no permanent gay venues, the Internet provides a virtual space for MSM to connect. Given these two factors, the Internet is a logical space to conduct research on MSM populations in regions like Niagara.

In addition to providing additional spaces of research, the Internet provides a cost-effective and efficient source of data (Christians & Chen, 2004). Collecting information posted publicly online makes it possible to gather information whenever and wherever the researcher may have access to a device connected to the Internet. Additionally, since

the content is already printed in digital form, tools such as "copy & paste" makes it efficient for the researcher to save and store their data. This makes Internet research beneficial for graduate students with minimal funding and a short timeline. The Internet offers a cost-effective and time-effective space for the qualitative methods employed in this research. However, there are ethical concerns with this form of research. For example, researchers analyze individuals' data without their knowledge (King, 1996). Even though materials online may be publically available, as is the case with the data collected in this research, the analysis and presentation of the material to an audience other than the poster intended may result in an ethical dilemma. As such, it is important that the researcher to practice discretion to protect the privacy of subjects when conducting online research.

Summary

This chapter has discussed why I used personal advertisements and dating profiles for this research. I began this chapter by describing the analytical tools utilized to analyze the text and images employed by subjects to (re)produce representations of themselves online. Working within a queer theoretical framework, I am using a Foucauldian discourse analysis on the texts and images to deconstruct these self-representations to highlight how power relations influence the performative virtual bodies of MSM on *Craigslist* and *POF*. In Chapters 4 and 5, I discuss the six themes that I introduced in this chapter to demonstrate how *Craigslist* and *POF*, respectively, govern performative embodied representations of MSM in the Niagara Region. This chapter has demonstrated that these virtual sites are rich sources of data largely untapped by geographers.

Chapter IV: *Craigslist* Analysis

Introduction

Emerging from my theoretical framework my argument is that embedded heteronormative discourses in digital spaces limit the queer expressions of MSM Online personal advertisements are one type of digital site that provides MSM a space to connect. Gudelunas (2005) states:

> Born and raised in isolation from other homosexuals, gays and lesbians who find it difficult to meet similarly minded subjects through their established social networks have found personal ads to be an effective and relatively anonymous way to meet others for love and friendship outside of an urban gay ghetto. (2)

With personal advertisements now available online, subjects can connect with others on personal computers and mobile devices with access to the Internet.

Using a queer approach and associated methodologies, this chapter analyzes personal advertisements posted by MSM in the *men seeking men* section of *Craigslist* within the Niagara Region. This chapter includes the analysis of two hundred fifty personal advertisements posted over the course of twenty-five days in September and October 2013. Consideration of the architecture of the site, the textual and visual virtual embodied performativities and privacy, I aim to present the ongoing processes on *Craigslist* governing normative subjectivities in the sample collected on that site.

To begin, I analyzed and coded the data into the following categories: representations of sexuality, gendered representations, influence of disease (in particular HIV) and mediation of privacy. Privacy is a central facet of online representations within the

sample collected. As this chapter demonstrates, the hypersexualized representations of MSM that contrast heteronormative expectations within the sample collected on *Craigslist* are censored by the self to conceal the author's material identity. The heteronormative discourses embedded in *Craigslist*, I assert, regulate the representations of MSM posted on the site.

Craigslist

With the increasing popularity of the Internet in Western society, personal advertisements of subjects seeking to meet others may be published online (Cocks, 2009). The largest of all online personal advertisement sites is *Craigslist. Craigslist* worldwide is divided into local sites of major metropolitan areas or regions. This research examines *Craigslist's* Niagara Region site. The plethora of content, the free-to-use aspect and the simple design of the digital site makes it highly accessible to the general public with access to and knowledge of the Internet. The site offers multiple services to the general public online beyond providing a space for MSM to connect. Since *Craigslist* offers services to a wider population than MSM, I assert that heteronormative discourses are embedded into the website policies, design and interrelated geographic scales.

Findings

Research on the sample of two hundred fifty personal advertisements collected on *Craigslist* in this work typically present an intersection of masculinity. A summary of the coded findings is presented in Table I. This table presents the data coded into categories of age of authors, images included in personal advertisements, representations of sexuality and gender, sexualized content, race, STIs and notions of privacy. As the

following discussion presents, these coded categories highlights how heteronormative discourses embedded in the complex geographies of this site and performativities regulate MSM subjectivities in the sample collected.

Table I. Representations of MSM on *Craigslist*

	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Age of Subject		
18-25	88	35.2%
26-35	66	26.4%
36-45	48	19.2%
46-55	27	10.8%
55+	6	2.4%
Unknown	15	6%
Images		
Personal advertisements with images	69	27.6%
Personal advertisements with sexualized images	64	92.8%*
Personal advertisements with face pictures	4	5.8%**
Sexuality		
"Straight", bisexual, curious, questioning	66	26.4%
Gay	1	0.4%
Not mentioned	179	71.6%
N/A (rants)	5	2%
Gendered Performativities		
Masculine	177	70.8%
Effeminate	9	3.6%
Unknown	59	23.6%
N/A (rants)	5	2%
Sexualized Content		
Penis	143	57.2%
Anus	13	5.2%
Penis and anus	7	2.8%
General Sex (e.g. oral, mutual masturbation, anal sex, etc.)	79	31.6%
Not sexual	3	1.2%
N/A (rants)	5	2%
Race - Self		
White/Caucasian	11	4.4%
Asian	2	0.8%
Mix	1	0.4%
Race – Potential partner		
White	3	1.2%

Black	6	2.4%
Asian	1	0.4%
"Latino"	1	0.4%
Sexually Transmitted Infections		
HIV	1	0.4%
Other STIs (by name)	0	0%
"Clean", drug and disease free (DDF, D&DF)	76	30.4%
Privacy		
Discretion offered/requested	48	19.2%

N=250
***** Based on 69 personal advertisements including images
** Based on 69 personal advertisements including images

"Straight-Acting" Subjectivities

The complex relationship between geographic scales contributes to the regulations of MSM subjectivities. These scales include, but are not limited to, the national, local and the body. Brown *et al.* (2007) argue that place and sexuality are mutually constituted. In the twentieth-century, gay ghettos/villages and commercial venues were key sites in the formation of gay politics and culture (Bell & Valentine, 1995; Brown *et al*., 2007; Nash, 2013). At the time the data were collected, the bathhouse in Fort Erie had recently closed, but the two LGBTQ clubs were in operation. Only one advertiser who identified as being fifty years old made reference to attending a gay venue; a bathhouse in Hamilton. The personal advertisement titled "Central Spa in Fort Erie – CLOSED – 50" that states, "Anyone interested in going to the bathhouse in Hamilton. Will drive" is the personal advertisement to make reference to attending a gay venue; all others sought to meet in private residences or in public places typically used for cruising. Thus, subjects presented within the sample collected opt to meet in spaces typically dominated by heteronormativity. Public spaces (Namaste, 1996; Browne, 2004) and homes (Valentine, 1993; Johnston & Valentine, 1995; Elwood, 2000; Gorman-Murray, 2006) are embedded

with heteronormative discourses. However, gendered and sexual dominance in these spaces are fluid through subversive bodily acts. *Craigslist* itself is also a site which offers a digital space for heterosexuals and homosexuals to connect. As such, ongoing heterosexual processes and homosexual processes constitute this digital space. If spaces with heterosexual processes are being used to connect and socialize with other MSM, how are these spaces influencing MSM subjectivities?

Research on online personal advertisements found that "small town advertisers, both men and women, were more likely to identify as bisexual, straight or questioning than large city advertisers" (Gudelunas, 2005, 16-17). Although this thesis cannot provide insight on the likeliness of large city subjects posting personal advertisements declaring their sexual identities as bisexual, straight or questioning, this research does provide insight into the self-proclaimed and desirable sexual identities of a sample of "small [city]" advertisers collected from Niagara's MSM *Craigslist*.[9] Most of the personal advertisements collected in this research do not mention a sexual subjectivity. While a majority of the personal advertisements collected in this sample do not specifically state sexual preferences, the dominant expression of sexual identities when present in representations are straight, bisexual, curious or questioning. Presenting expressions of sexual identities, for example, subjects stated:

> grape and wine – 25 – "I'm straight and only top"
>
> Str8 Boy Looking for Mutual – 21 – "Straight but curious student"
>
> Straight, horny and looking – 23 – "I'm a young curious guy"

[9] Gudelunas (2005) identifies a "small town" as a municipality without a centralized gay district and may only have a couple of permanent establishments (if any at all). While St. Catharines is by no means a small town, it is a smaller city, the municipality correlates with Gudelunas' characteristics in terms of gay districts and establishments.

> Jerk off while playing porn – 35 – "Prefer attached bi/str8 as me [sic]"
>
> bi guy with a big tool looking for tonight – 36 – "bi guy here…"
>
> SEXY BI MALE SEEKS THE SAME – 44 – "I am a tall fit attached bi male…"

Sexual categories such as those in the above examples typically represented by authors in the title or text, though often included in both, emphasize some sort of heterosexual identity. Gudelunas (2005) found that these sexual identities by MSM in small towns are associated with concealing their homosexual behaviours.

Personal advertisements on *Craigslist* emphasising sexualities other than "gay" while seeking same-sex suggests that sexual behaviours do not constitute a sexual type. In other words, a man having sex with another man does not constitute the subject as being "gay". While all of the personal advertisements collected in this research properly categorized as *Casual Encounters* sought sexual encounters with other men, the sixty-six subjects who identified particular subjectivities avoided using the label "gay"; either because it was assumed or because they sought a non-gay partner. Researching Los Angeles *Craigslist* personal advertisements in the men seeking men section, Ward (2015) claims:

> The ads depict a world in which body parts and sex acts (male mouths touching male penises, for instances) are not meaningful indicators of whether sexual participants are straight or gay. Instead, it is a willingness to identify with and consume gay culture that makes others queer, and conversely, it is 'str8 dudes' mastery of hetero-masculine culture and their capacity to infuse homosexual sex with heterosexual normalcy that makes them straight. (p. 130)

Representations of masculine archetypes and heterosexuality while seeking homosexual sex allow subjects to maintain their heterosexual identities. One subject went as far as to request no "gay" men. His ad read: "older4younger – 55" posted 'older guy here want

young guy to come to my house kick back watch porn and me do them. young str8 or bi guys ONLY. no gay guys sorry; if you are gay4pay that's kool to.; again STR8/BI ONLY…[sic]"[10] The presence of heterosexual MSM within the site constitutes particular understandings and processes within this sexualized place.

Intersectionality of Masculinity

Since this research examines men, it is unsurprising that particular masculinities are a common theme in the data. The production of virtual bodies through text and images (see Downing, 2013) employed in personal advertisements provides insight into the masculinities being represented in the *Craigslist* sample. Butler (2008:1990), for example, argues that the stylization of the body is performativity. The representation of gendered and sexed bodies through repetitive text and images "naturalizes" dominant embodied representations while marking "deviant" bodies as "Others". Butler's (2008:1990) notion of performativity provides insight into the regulating forces governing the normalized virtual bodies of MSM on *Craigslist*.

In order to examine these embodied masculinities on *Craigslist*, it is necessary to understand how subjects interact with the website when producing self-representations on the website. How subjects interact with the site is determined by the policies and layout of the site. For example, *Craigslist* regulates the content published on the site through policies. *Craigslist* limits representations through its policies by prohibiting "offensive" and "obscene" content (*Craigslist*, 2015, Prohibited). No further definition to offensive or obscene is provided. With the site containing a policy which prohibits "offensive" or

[10] "str8" is an abbreviation for "straight" (as in sexuality)

"obscene" behaviour suggests that *Craigslist* may limit particular queer expressions or fetishes which counter normative expectations. For example, all sexual behaviours presented in the sample collected consist of mutual or self masturbation, oral sex or anal sex. These normative sexual behaviours are seemingly acceptable within a local narrative defining "offensive" or "obscene" behaviour.

The layout of the website also regulates the representations of MSM in the sample collected. When posting a personal advertisement on *Craigslist,* subjects must select categories for their sex, age and where to post their personal advertisement in a drop-down menu and fill in a free-form text field. Cassidy (2013) found that gay men on the social media site *Gaydar* compromised by selecting options from the drop-down menu that fit closest to their identities and used to free-form text to provide more detailed and "individualized" information about themselves. Gudelunas (2005) found that men seeking other men in smaller cities through personal advertisements on the website *PlanetOut* used free-form text to express masculinity and seek "'other straight acting,' 'masculine,' and not 'femme'" partners (p. 20).

I found similar patterns. In the sample, free-form text provides subjects the opportunity to seek other men with particular masculine characteristics and performances. The repetitive presentations drawing from similar discourses (re)producing archetypal masculine subjects provides insight into the normalcy of masculinity within the sample collected.

Normative Gender Representation – (Re)producing a Masculine Archetype

The free-form text on *Craigslist* allows subjects to (re)produce representations about themselves and whom they desire. Masculine representations are present in the majority

of the personal advertisements collected in this research. The masculine archetype which dominates the sample collected on *Craigslist* typically consists of masculine (i.e. muscular, athletic, etc.), white, younger MSM. Typical representations of hegemonic understandings of masculine physique include:

> athletic discreet lookin to suck – 28 – "gl guy here. you must be clean ddf and hwp"[11]
>
> suck and swallow – 28 – "5 foot 11. 160 lbs. fit body. gl."
>
> let's have some fun – 21 – "Fit hot body, athletic"
>
> suck and handies – 21 – "seeking someone under 30 and attractive, athletic build with a nice big smooth dick"
>
> Seeking Jerk Off partner at Niagara Hotel – 35 – "I'm a nonsmokers, masculine and muscular, sane, Ddf DL guy… [seeking] discreet muscular, masculine guy from 25 to 42 for a jerk off (only)"[12]

As the above personal advertisement titled Seeking Jerk Off partner at Niagara Hotel, indicates, the subject is seeking a "muscular, masculine guy" and also that he is masculine and muscular. Gudelunas (2005) found that men seeking men in smaller towns were more likely to seek other men similar to their gender and sexuality. For example, a self-proclaimed bisexual, masculine man is likely to seek other bisexual, masculine men. This post, along with most of the others collected in this research expressed the desire for men with similar normative gendered characteristics, particularly masculine, and sexuality (when specified) as the advertiser.

Repetitive seeking of masculine men suggests a performative desire for men who embody traditional gender norms within the sample collected when the research was conducted. Additionally, fifteen personal advertisements collected in this research attribute

[11] gl is an acronym for "good looking", ddf is an acronym for "drug & disease free", and hwp is an acronym for "height/weight proportional".
[12] DL is an acronym for 'down low' and STD is an acronym for 'sexually transmitted diseases'.

masculine gender performativities to normalcy or sanity. For example, one personal advertisement entitled "fill me tonight – 45" expresses this desire for normalcy by stating, "i'm a masculine attached guy looking for the same for discrete sex. looking for a normal sane guy to use me to get off. [sic]" This desire for men who maintain "normal", traditional gender performativities and not effeminate men was a consistent theme in the data collected from *Craigslist.*

Though considerably less frequent than masculine representations, effeminate men were also among the data collected from *Craigslist*. Effeminate representations in the sample collected typically consisted of images with men wearing women's underwear. For example, the personal advertisement titled Looking for fun – 22 included three images that focused on the anus of the subject; one of which the subject is wearing women's undergarments. Out of the nine personal advertisements which include effeminate representations only one seeks effeminate men. "Looking for cock whoreship Both ways – 45", seeks is the only advertisement collected that seeks "gay or fem acting men". The significantly low number of effeminate representations and almost non-existent expression of desire for effeminate men in the data collected supports the assertion of performative normalcy of traditional, masculine performances in this sample. Since the website policies and layout do not explicitly exclude effeminate representations of MSM, the normalcy of traditional masculinity suggests a local understanding of MSM subjectivities and a particular understanding of *Craigslist* when the sample was collected. However, due to methodological limitations, further conclusions on these local understandings of MSM subjectivities and *Craigslist* when the sample was collected cannot be made.

The Phallus

Included in the intersection of masculine subjectivities of MSM in the sample collected is the erect penis. The erect penis, or phallus, has long been a symbol of power and masculinity; this is particularly true of large penises (Kibby & Costello, 1999). The erect penis is the most common sexual representation in the sample collected. Men would describe their own or the ideal penis in the title and text of the personal advertisements. Everything from size, shape, circumcision status and the presence or absence of pubic hair is described in detail in many personal advertisements.

In many personal advertisements, the penis was the central focus of the ad. For example, personal advertisements emphasizing the penis typically presented as the following:

> Looking for early morning bj outdoors – 39 – "9 inch clean cock"
>
> touch my cock at the uranal [sic]– 25 – "9 inches uncut and full of cum for you"
>
> Looking for discreet bi curious jerk meetup – 21 – "[seeking] larger than 7" dick"
>
> bi guy with a big tool looking for tonight – 36 – "here with a big cock 8 / 9 inches cut looking for other discrete guys in good shape looking to drain me and have some fun must be on the DL. get back with some pics of the body and cock [sic]."

This last personal advertisement also included two images of the poster's erect penis. In this personal advertisement, the title, description of the self and his request of respondents all focus on the penis. The size of the penis remained an important factor for the men posting personal advertisements on *Craigslist* to emphasize masculinity.

Age

Age is typically included in the intersection of MSM masculine subjectivities (see Nash, 2013). Considering the digital divide, younger generations of men in their twenties and thirties have higher access to online places than others (Chen & Wellman, 2005; Servon, 2002). This digital divide is evident in the sample collected. The percentage of representations of MSM decreases with older age groups. As such, the digital divide contributes to the representations of MSM. Within the sample collected, younger MSM prevail in this space.

Typically when a desired age was specified, advertisers on *Craigslist* often sought younger men. Examples of such expressions of desired age are:

> Older4younger – 55 – "young str8 or bi guys ONLY… 18-35 nice body and a nice cock"
>
> Looking to bust in your ass – 46 – "looking for a younger guy"
>
> horny bttm guy – 36 – "Looking for some one or couple my age or younger fit only"
>
> decew house Sunday morning – 38 – "Like younger guys who look after themselves"

Subjects in their late-teens and twenties posting personal advertisements usually sought other men close to their age. For example, the personal advertisement entitled "Str8 Boy Looking for Mutual – 21" states, "Straight but curious student... Wants someone close to my age. Will not go over 30. Clean [sic]". Within the sample collected, other than a few exceptions, thirty to thirty-five seemed to be the oldest age of a partner MSM would consider for having sex. This is similar to findings in other research. In the case of personal advertisements in Los Angeles *Craigslist*, Ward (2015) presents an

advertisement entitled "$300 Bucks Cash If You're STR8 & Goodlooking!!!..."-27, "Hey, are you str8, good-looking and broke? Are you Under 30 and hella cool?... Be under 30. Honestly STR8. I'm mostly str8, great looking chill bro" (p.130). Even within my sample of personal advertisements authored by subjects up to their sixties, such as the personal advertisement entitled "Master for sub – 60", sought younger men. In this ad the desired other is someone who is "25-50". As expressed in this personal advertisement, even men up to sixty who are open to having sex with men as old as fifty, ten years their junior, sought men as young as twenty-five. As such, age contributes to the intersectionality of desired subjects within the sample collected.

Excluded from the sample collected are those under the age of eighteen. This exclusion is due to the terms and conditions of the website. Even though the age of consent in Canada is sixteen and the age of consent is eighteen in situations of exploitation and anal sex (Department of Justice, 2015), *Craigslist* is a Californian organization, where the age of consent is eighteen (California Legislative Information, 2011). As such, the website prohibits anyone under the age of eighteen to post and restricts subjects from seeking anyone under eighteen. Before one can see the list of personal advertisements, *Craigslist* has a page with a "warning & disclaimer" regarding age and disease. The portion of *Craigslist's* "warning & disclaimer" regarding those under eighteen states "By clicking the link below you confirm that you are 18 or older and understand personals may include adult content… Please report suspected exploitation of minors." As such, regardless of the local legal age of consent, *Craigslist* governs the desires of subjects within this virtual site by banning interactions with those under eighteen.

The emphasis of desire for younger men within the sample collected may correlate with the occularcentric digital culture. Scholars found that images are important factors in connecting with other men online (Brown *et al*., 2005; Mowlabocus, 2010; Cassidy, 2013). Harris (1997) claims that gay men were less concerned with the physical appearance of their mates prior to the "heterosexualizing" of gay male culture. Media technologies, including digital technologies, reinforce physical aesthetics, contributing to a culture which places significant importance on physical traits of desire.

Race

Scholars argue that a homonormativity favours white men (Duggan, 2002; Nash 2013). In the sample that I collected from *Craigslist*, subjects rarely mentioned race. The majority of the men describing their race identify as white. Images included in personal advertisements provide greater insight into the "race" of the subject posting ads because the image typically displayed the tone of the skin. The dominance of whiteness makes sense considering only just over six percent of the population in the Niagara Region are visible minorities (Niagara Region, n.d., Immigrant / Ethnic Populations - Statistics in Niagara). The lack of subjects specifying their racial identities gives insight into the neutrality of whiteness on *Craigslist* in the Niagara Region.

Interest in finding a partner of a particular racialized background was even less frequent. The most common desire expressed was for black men. The desire for a black man was consistently connected with the desire to have sex with someone with a large penis. The personal advertisement entitled "looking for a black guy – 28" simply posted "host black guy with huge load [sic]". Others like "feeling like I may be bicurious – 24" goes into

more detail when describing the characteristics he is seeking by stating "Big dicks and black both pluses (9"+, proof please). [sic]". hooks (2004) argues that the discourse of the large Black man's penis used to demean and subordinate the subject have paradoxically become the "calling cards" for masculinity among some Black subjects. In other words, if the phallus is a symbol of masculinity, the desire for a particular race is also a desire for masculinity.

Drug & Disease Free (DDF) – Concerns of HIV

Heteronormative discourses of healthy bodies and understandings of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) embedded in *Craigslist* regulate MSM representations included in my sample collected. In particular, HIV/AIDS is the only mentioned infection by the website and subjects posting personal advertisements. There is little denying that HIV/AIDS significantly affected gay men's culture (Mowlabocus, 2010). In the 1980s and into the 1990s, HIV/AIDS became known as the "gay disease" (Harris, 1997). Arguably, HIV/AIDS is still known as such. Thus, on the *Disclaimer and Warning* page, for example, and before one has access to the list of personal advertisements, *Craigslist* warns those on the site that "Safer sex greatly reduces the risk of STDs (e.g. HIV)." *Craigslist* displays this warning in advance of all sections of the personal advertisements. This, and the fact that it is the only infection listed on the site and among MSM suggests that HIV/AIDS influences the embodied representations on this site.

About thirty percent of the personal advertisements collected mentioned STIs in some way. As is evident in the following personal advertisements collected in this sample, posters would typically state that they are "clean" or "ddf" and are seeking the same:

> lights are off... come and BREED ME – 25 – "Must be disease free and HIV negative"
>
> Like to Deepthroat? – 48 – "Clean, discreet, ddfree"
>
> chill smooth white guy – 30 – "[I am] ddf; clean and discreet"
>
> need your moning wood serviced? – 30 – "Must be clean ddf and discrete."

No one admitted that they had an STI of any kind. This is consistent with Gudelunas' (2005) findings that men in "small towns" are less likely to reveal whether they have an STI, because of fear of exposure of their health status and sexual behaviours. In the data collected for this thesis, subjects included descriptions of seeking or being "clean" in addition to discretion. For example, a personal advertisement entitled "Relief?" stated, "Oral pleasure this morning (one way or mutual). Must be clean and discrete. Am clean and discrete too [sic]". As such, the desire for men "clean" of STIs is not only the desire for healthy bodies, but a component of mediating privacy.

Mediating Privacy

As more people connect online more often, and through various types of portals, their concerns regarding Internet security and privacy have become common. MSM seeking other men online are not exempt from these concerns. Cassidy (2013) found that gay men on *Facebook* would alter their privacy settings and be cognizant of the content they post to prevent being recognized and "outed" in material space. However, there are geographic and social advantages for MSM to connect with other men online. One such geographic advantage of men seeking sex with other men online is that it offers discrete social interactions with minimal risk of being "outed" or discriminated against (Gudelunas, 2005). Gudelunas (2005) states:

> The anonymous nature of online soliciting for these small town residents provides a discreet option to meet someone of the same sex without walking into any public spaces such as a gay bar or bookstore–if such clearly marked gay and lesbian spaces are even locally available. In fact, numerous ads from small towns placed by individuals who are not forthcoming with their sexual orientation specifically mention the need for respondents to be discreet. (17)

The ability to "cruise" within the privacy of one's own home promotes a seemingly safer way to participate in same-sex intimacies without being recognized by others in public. However, the risk of being "outed" or discriminated against still remains. Cassidy (2013) concludes that gay men's digital cultures are significantly constituted through the mediation of privacy and safety concerns. On social media sites like *Facebook,* for instance, privacy of one's site can be altered through different options. However, there are no privacy setting options on *Craigslist*. All personal advertisements posted are listed in chronological order of their submission. As such, privacy is mediated through the self disclosure.

Although personal advertisements are a rich source of information about the subjects posting the advertisement (Gudelunas, 2005; Child *et al*., 1996), scholars argue that the representations of MSM online are heavily self-censored due to concerns of privacy and safety (Cassidy, 2013). As such, privacy becomes a central point in digital representations of MSM. Since there are no privacy controls on *Craigslist*, advertiser's attempts to conceal identity are mediated through the information provided in text and images while describing the self, the emphasis on discretion and the requested meeting places for face-to-face connections.

Most of the personal advertisements collected in this research are well-crafted to conceal the identity of the advertiser. While most of the personal advertisements consist of some

description of the self, this information is superficial. Personal information provided in the personal advertisements describes general physical characteristics such as physique, penis size, age, race and STI status. For example, in a personal advertisement titled suck and swallow – 27, the advertiser describes himself as a "Chill dude here lookin [sic] for local fun. I'm six feet tall, one hundred fifty pounds. Fit body. Seven inch cut cock and a tight ass." Accompanying images if posted would display similar characteristics. Images typically focused on the penis or physique (i.e. images of abdominal muscles if physically fit). Identifiable information like tattoos and faces were entirely omitted from images. For example, the personal advertisement just mentioned included an image of the subject topless with a muscular physique, but included no identifiable imagery (e.g. tattoos or a face picture). Even image backgrounds gave little identifiable information, as most of the images were too close to the subjects to provide any identifiable background. Images with a background consisted of neutral coloured walls without decoration. As such, it would be incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to identify someone in the sample collected based on the information posted on personal advertisements.

Out of all of the personal advertisements collected for this research, only four contained images of the advertiser's face. One of the four was posted by a tourist visiting Niagara Falls. Since he was only visiting Niagara, being "outed" locally poses little threat to him wherever he may be from; especially since his home location is omitted from the personal advertisement. Although the subject posting the personal advertisement openly displays images of his face, he still states that he is a "discreet guy" as if to comfort other, possibly local men that their identities will be concealed. The emphasis of subjects promising

discretion is a characteristic associated with mediating digital and material privacy on this site.

Men posting personal advertisements on *Craigslist* may describe themselves as discreet or seek discreet connections. As is evident in "Masculine Discreet Bi Guy Looking – 44", men would emphasize that they are discreet in the titles of their personal advertisement and while (re)producing representations of the self in the text of the advertisement. Others would imply that they are discreet by demanding that the respondent be discreet. "I'm a first time top or bottom you choose – 31" writes, "I'm a 300 lbs 31 year old married straight guy so discretion is a must." This demand of discretion is commonly associated with men who presented themselves as masculine, straight, bisexual or bicurious. The necessity for discretion for masculine and in some way, heterosexual men (i.e. they have sex with women, too) suggests that their sexual desires for men may be hidden in their public performative subjectivities. Revisiting Gudelunas (2005), MSM not forthcoming about their homosexual behaviours require discretion. As such, MSM masculine and sexual subjectivities previously discussed in the sample collected may also be a way to mediate privacy in material spaces.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter analyzed the two hundred fifty personal advertisements collected for this case study from the *men seeking men* section for Niagara Region's *Craigslist*. I assert that heteronormative discourses embedded in the design, policies and social interactions on *Craigslist* regulate MSM representations in the sample collected. Using a queer analysis, this chapter examines how the website design and performativity governs particular

MSM subjectivities (re)produced on *Craigslist*. The findings of this research correlate with the small town findings conducted by Gudelunas (2005). The sample of MSM in the Niagara Region posting personal advertisements on *Craigslist* express an intersection of archetypal masculine performativities through embodied representations. Subjects posting personal advertisements emphasized their own or expressed a desire in muscular, younger, masculine men with a large penis and healthy bodies. Additionally, the sample illustrates that MSM desires during the study period and in Niagara exclude effeminate, "gay" men. However, subsequent visits to the site also illustrate that such posts do occur.

Throughout different social media sites, mediation of privacy is a central facet of gay men's digital culture (Cassidy, 2013). Due to the highly accessible design of the website and the lack of privacy controls, online privacy was mediated by subjects by presenting superficial, general information about their body through text and images. Images included in the personal advertisements almost always focus on their penis and other parts of the body which would typically be covered by clothing. Posters typically exclude tattoos, faces and other identifiable characteristics from images or to prevent accidental disclosure of identities. These attempts to mediate the very public and accessible website *Craigslist* to maintain privacy reduces the possibility of being recognized by those they may know in their personal or professional lives.

Almost every personal advertisement collected in my sample presented a highly sexualized representation of MSM. These sexual representations contrast heteronormative expectations. Heteronormative expectations have regulated homosexual bodies to desexualize embodied representations and behaviours (Bell & Valentine, 1995; Duggan, 2002; Brown *et al.*, 2007). As such, I conclude, the mediation of privacy to conceal

material identities in hypersexualized representations is a product of heteronormative discourses regulating MSM bodies in this sample. My conclusion correlates with Fullick's (2013) findings on heterosexual dating profiles in that representations in their sample lacked sexually explicit images and text. In Fullick's (2013) study, heteronormative discourses regulate gender performativities of heterosexuals as desexualized subjects. My conclusion becomes more evident when considering representations of MSM seeking homonormative relationships as discussed in Chapter 5 in this thesis. As the proceeding chapter suggests, homonormative MSM subjectivities represented on the dating website *PlentyOfFish* (*POF*) are less concerned with privacy in comparison to subjects participating in hypersexual behaviour or sexual curiosity.

Chapter V: *PlentyOfFish* Analysis

Introduction

The increasing popularity and possibilities of the Internet in the West has altered how people meet and potentially form relationships (Villani *et al.*, 2012). By 2010, online dating in Canada was reported among the most active worldwide (Oliveira, 2010). Dating profiles are designed for subjects to present "romantically marketable" selves through promotional gendered representations (Fullick, 2013, 546). In other words, Internet dating sites provide digital spaces for subjects to produce profiles of themselves presenting their physical appearance, demographics and personality traits.

This thesis argues that heteronormative discourses embedded in the complex relationship between geographies of scale regulate the online representations of MSM included in my sample. Using a queer approach and methodologies, this chapter analyzes dating profiles of MSM in the Niagara Region on the Internet dating site *PlentyOfFish* (*POF).* Analysis of one hundred dating profiles published and active on *POF* collected over the course of twenty days in September 2013 demonstrates that heteronormative discourses embedded in the site govern particular representations of MSM. In particular, website design, the performativity of bodies and notions of online privacy contribute to particular representations of MSM in the sample collected.

As the evidence demonstrates, subjects can be divided into two groups; (1) those seeking a relationship of some sort and (2) those solely seeking sex. While both groups present an intersection of performative masculinity, the differences between their sexual and romantic performativities and desires produce different results in how the two groups

mediate online privacy. To present my argument, this chapter begins by discussing the website design and policies of *POF* and how heteronormative discourses in the design produces particular embodied representations. This discussion includes how the website design produces a hierarchy of relationship-type desires. From there, analysis of the data is coded into the following categories constituting and intersection of masculinity: embodied representations of physique, class, age, race and health. Lastly, this chapter presents the mediation of privacy by MSM subjects based on the intersection of masculinity, including the relationship desires, advertisers develop. This chapter concludes that heteronormative discourses regulate bodies which results in self-censorship of MSM representations based on the relationship-types desired.

Findings

Research on the sample of one hundred dating profiles collected on *POF* in my work typically present an intersection of masculinity. The coded findings from this sample are presented in Table II. This table presents the data coded into categories of age of authors, the author's intent, body type of authors, gendered performativities, images included in dating profiles, race, STIs and notions of privacy. As the following discussion regarding this sample presents, the data highlights how heteronormative discourses embedded in the complex geographies of this site and performativities regulate MSM representations in the sample collected.

Table II. Representations of MSM on *POF*

	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Age of Subject		
18-25	40	40%
26-35	32	32%

36-45	18	18%
46-55	9	9%
56+	1	1%
Intent/Relationship Type		
Seeking a relationship	60	60%
Seeking friendship/relationship	8	8%
Seeking sex	32	32%
Body Type		
Thin	9	9%
Athletic	28	28%
Average	36	36%
A Few Extra Pounds	6	6%
Big & Tall/BBW	3	3%
Prefer Not To Say	18	18%
Gendered Performativities		
Masculine	83	83%
Effeminate	4	4%
Unknown	13	13%
Images		
Profiles included an image	63	63%
Images included by men seeking relationship	57	90.5%*
Images included by men seeking sex	6	9.5%*
Profiles with images of subject's face	62	98.4%*
Profiles with images of subject's face by men seeking sex	0	0%**
Race - Self		
White/Caucasian	92	92%
"Middle-Eastern"	2	2%
Asian	4	4%
Mix	2	2%
Race – Potential partner		
White	1	1%
Other	0	0%
Sexually Transmitted Infections		
Mentions STIs (e.g. "clean", DDF)	3	3%
Privacy		
Discretion offered/requested	4	4%

* Based on 63 profiles with images

** Based on 6 profiles of men seeking sex with images in their profile

PlentyOfFish

POF is a Canadian-based Internet dating site founded in Vancouver in 2003 (*PlentyOfFish*, 2015, Press). This site is the world's largest free online dating site (la Rose, 2015). *POF* is one of the few dating websites that allows subjects to connect and message others without paying a fee. While *POF* is free for anyone to use, the option for subjects to pay to become a *Premium* member to promote their profile at the top of potential mates exists. However, at no time did I encounter a *Premium* member of a MSM in or around the Niagara Region.

POF is a dating website which offers services for heterosexual or homosexual connections. *POF* is fully accessible to anyone in Canada with connection to the Internet and the computer literacy to interact with the Internet dating site. However, in order to create a dating profile on the site, subjects must have a valid e-mail address to register their profile. At the time I was collecting data, subjects, in order to publish a profile, had to use drop-down menus and free-form sections to input a username (which is typically a witty alias), a headline, gender, age, country, location, ethnicity, body type, smoking status, profession, intent (e.g. relationship, friends, hang out, etc.), education, personality, an *About Me* section and the desired gender of a potential partner. *POF* also offers the option to include images. Most categories, however, only allow subjects to make their selection from a drop-down menu.

At the time the sample was collected, selections from drop-down menus contained heteronormative discursive options that subjects had to choose from in order to publish their profile. Drop-down menus limit subjects from choosing anything that does not

conform to the normative discourses of the website (Cassidy, 2013). For example, *POF* limits subjects' ability to choose gender identities for both posters and for their desired type of partner; the options are limited to *man* or *woman*. Considering that *POF* connects subjects with others based on the selections made in those two gender-based drop-down menus, it is impossible to seek others outside of those normative categories. By providing only binary gender categories to select from, drawing from Butler's (1990:2008) notions of gender and sex (as discussed in Chapter 2), *POF* naturalizes sexed bodies. While this process to naturalize sexed bodies may contradict the ability in the website for subjects to connect with others of the same sex, I assert that they must do so within a heteronormative understanding of bodies and relationships.

The purpose and design of *POF*, I claim, governs MSM subjects on the Internet dating site as homonormative subjects. *POF* governs homonormative representations and relationship desires through the sites design and policies to promote traditional heteronormative relationships (i.e. monogamous relationships); though resistance is possible. For example, the homepage of *POF* boasts that "*POF* Has More Dates, More Relationships, More Visits Than Any Other Dating Site" *(PlentyOfFish*, 2015, Home). *POF* reports that one million relationships are formed on the Internet dating site (*PlentyOfFish*, 2015, Press). During this study, however, *POF* makes no mention of subjects connecting for the purpose of casual sex. In May 2013, four months prior to collecting my sample, *POF* removed the "Intimate Encounter" option in the "Intent" category on profiles to reduce the number of users on the site for casual sex (Bignell & Hastings, 2013). Moreover, the large amount of mandatory information on dating profiles with additional options such as chemistry tests which the site states will "lead to long

lasting stable relationships". These heteronormative relationship discourses encourage performativities of MSM on the site by making the process of connecting for the purpose of sex with others more involved than other commonly used sites (see, for example, Chapter 4).

Relationship-Type Subjectivities

As I stated, the data collected on *POF* for this research can be separated into two groups; (1) those seeking a relationship of some sort and (2) those solely seeking sex. I was able to deduce the relationship-type that subjects in this sample sought by examining the mandatory "Intent" category and the information provided in the free-form section of the profile. For example, subjects seeking relationships typically produced profiles with information that resemble the following:

> mik_ph – 45 – Casual Dating – "new to the area just see who out there From time to time I'm on this site hoping to meet Mr right"
>
> canadaboy1 – 36 – Casual Dating – "I am looking for that special guy to grow with and share my life with"

In contrast, subjects seeking sex typically sought "fun" or something "casual". Examples of this include:

> Wellandguy1990 – 23 – Hang Out – "looking for some fun, discrete, would like to try some new things. I've never experienced anything likes this before"
>
> Niagaraguy89 – 30 – Hang Out – "Looking for masc and dl straight or bi guys from the area for something casual"

POF regulates those using the site through website policies and design to conform to traditional heteronormative relationship types, though resistance is possible and occurs on the site.

The procedure in producing a dating profile on *POF* regulates relationship types. Subjects must choose desired relationship types with the use of drop-down categories titled "Intent". This mandatory drop-down category limits subjects to seeking a *long-term relationship, casual dating, friends* or *hang out.*[13] Being able to select only one of the options limits the ability of the subject to find others. One subject, for example, states: "I hate how this site limits you to one choice in regards to "what are you looking for". Truth is, I really am open to any number of things, depends on the person and the chemistry" (luvn_you , 21). Like most other subjects seeking more than one type of relationship, luvn_you used the free-form category *About Me* to inform others that they are seeking something different. *POF* regulates relationship types by making subjects select one, and only one option. This limits their ability to search for multiple types of relationships, especially those outside of mainstream tastes.

In addition to being forced to select a pre-determined option regarding a desired relationship, none of the drop-down options is explicitly sexual. *POF* also prohibits images containing nudity and vulgar language. Both heteronormative and homonormative discourses favour desexualized representations of homosexuals (Bell & Valentine, 1995; Duggan, 2002; Brown *et al*., 2007). While *POF* censors sexualized representations presented on the site, there are still subjects in my sample who solely seek sex. The transgression by introducing sexual desires instead of relationship desires on *POF* queers the geographic space; albeit a digital space. Ironically, those resisting normative forces on *POF* are still working within the normative discourses set out by the website and others

[13] These selections have now changed to *casual dating*, *dating but nothing serious*, *relationship*, *actively seeking a relationship* and *finding someone to marry*. The option *hang out*, which was actively used for casual sex in this sample, is no longer available.

on the site. For example, for relationship type being sought, men seeking sex typically selected *hang out* and displayed images of their bare torsos. This seems to the limit to which images could be sexual without being removed from the site. However, since those solely seeking sex typically publish profiles without images, only three profiles in the sample collected contain images of the subject topless. One of these images includes the caption, "Do what you want". This sexual representation of the subject is considerably tame compared to the sexual representations on *Craigslist* (see Chapter 4). The website design and policies of *POF* at the time this research was conducted blanches the embodied performativities and desires of MSM subjects in the site.

Masculine Performativities

As mentioned, virtual bodies on dating profiles consist of visuals and text inputted by the subject. As McKie *et al.* (2010) found, the intelligible discourses presented in virtual bodies on Internet dating sites encourage MSM to develop and reaffirm their identities. This performativity is evident within the drop-down and free form categories of dating profiles. In particular, data collected from the *About Me* section of dating profiles typically consists of similar textual information from one profile to another. As the sample collected demonstrates, MSM subjectivities present an intersection of masculinities regulated by heteronormative discourses embedded in the site through a complex relationship of geographic scales and a local understanding of MSM subjectivities within this site at the time the data was collected. In research on Canadian heterosexual dating profiles of men and women on the dating site *Nerve.com*, Fullick (2013) found that heteronormative discourses of masculinity in heterosexual male dating profiles consist of an intersection of physique, ambition, intelligence and health. The

intersection of masculinity expressed in my sample reflects Fullick's findings. The intersection in my sample consists of the physique of masculine bodies, class and age. Less frequent in this intersection, but still worth discussing, is race and healthy bodies. The repetitive stylization of this particular intersection of masculinity constitutes a performative understanding of local MSM subjectivities on this site.

Intersection of Masculinities - Physique

Dating websites, [such as *POF*], provide subjects the opportunity to (re)produce bodies through the use of text and images (Downing, 2013). I found that the bodies and desires represented by MSM on *POF* attempt to present and reinforce hegemonic masculine bodies. Hegemonic masculine bodies within this research consist of signifiers such as a strong physique, white and an interest in physical activities (e.g. sports, hunting, etc.). Due to the policies and tools for censoring sexual representations on this site, the masculine bodies represented in the sample collected excluded descriptions and images of penises. Examples of the presentation of hegemonic masculinity typical in the sample collected are as follows:

> Niaman – looking for hot gym bods – 44 – "looking for hot men that work out just started back to the gym and looking for some hot motivation"
>
> DiscreetNiagaraFun – 44 – "I'm very athletic, and I lik'em that way too.... and, sexy guys who are slim, built, muscled can easily catch me looking...."
>
> Mikaq – 30 – "I enjoy the outdoors - kayaking, hiking, beach volleyball, sports"
>
> Aussie2108 – 28 – "I work-out often and I've been working hard to build some muscle"
>
> salming – 50 – just average guy who likes sports , fishing , hunting and camping and horror movies.....love to go on trips .....big baseball fan here

> .... the cleveland indians...love the movie ... Major League.....big Leafs fan also .....and Niagara Icedogs .....oh love to play the slots also and last but not least ....I wood like to storm chase.a tornado .....Twister is one of my favorite movies…[sic].

As is stated in the last example above, subjects attempt to present a normative intersection of masculinity by encompassing "just [your] average guy". Fullick (2013) found that heterosexual men present a particular intersection of masculinity which includes strength. For Fullick (2013), representations including physical activity and interest in sports (particularly playing sports) signified strength and healthy bodies. Similar techniques in coding representations is used in this work. For example, in salming's (50) profile, interest in sports and outdoor activities are presented in his representation. In this work, this is read similar to Fullick (213). Such representations provide insight into the physique and health of the subject.

On *POF*, bodies are categorized by subjects based on their physique. *Body Type* is a mandatory drop-down menu when producing a dating profile. Subjects must choose from a list from including "Thin", "Athletic", "Average", "A Few Extra Pounds", "Big & Tall/BBW" and "Prefer Not To Say" in order to produce a dating profile on the site. The mandatory selection categorizing bodies based on their physique governs embodied subjectivities of MSM subjects producing representations on this site. The sample illustrates that the majority of the subjects within the sample collected identify as "average" or "athletic"; bodies that are thin or heavy are underrepresented in the sample. Selection of the body-types is subjective based on the subject's understanding of the terms and their own bodies. For example, based on the images and text included in dating profiles, "average" typically pertains to men who are relatively active and have some

muscle mass. These representations of "average" men still present an intersection of masculinity attempting to resemble hegemonic understandings of masculinity.

Although the sample provides insight into the representations of MSM in regards to physique, it does not offer insight into desired physiques. While the site offers the subjects to specify in their search criteria desired body types of others, this information is not publicly posted on profiles. Those opting to "prefer not to say" consistently provided as little information to publish a dating profile on the site.

As geographers of sex, gender and sexuality have long argued, place constitutes gendered identities (Browne, 2007). Gudelunas (2005) found that MSM in smaller towns without a centralized gay village typically present masculine representations of themselves online when seeking other men; this finding is consistent with this sample. Masculine representations in such areas can be interpreted as a way of concealing homosexuality (Gudelunas, 2005). Several subjects in the sample explicitly state that they are discreet about their sexuality. carter8278 (27), for example, states:

> I prefer to be discrete about my sexuality in public and will not go out of my way to disclose my orientation unless directly asked by someone. I'm looking for someone who feels the same way or can either respect or tolerate this decision I've made in life... I act masculine and look for the same.

Although not entirely closeted, carter8278's masculine performativity and desire is an attempt to keep his sexuality discreet. While carter8278 never defines what masculine means to him, it can be read that expressing masculine performativities allows him to remain discreet about his sexuality in public. In other words, masculine performativities provides a particular subjectivity for this subject to go unnoticed in a heteronormative

public with regards to his sexuality. With this understanding of a particular gendered performativity, masculinity can be interpreted as socio-spatially "natural".

Intersectionality of Masculinities – Employment/Class

Masculine performativities extend beyond the body. McDowell (1994; 2005) argues that masculinity is tied to the workplace and economic success. *POF* makes it mandatory for subjects to input their profession when producing a dating profile and provides an optional category of *Income Level*. However, as the *Profession* category is a free-form option, subjects could include generic terms like "yes" or "worker". These are answers typically provided by people solely seeking sex. For example, Niagaraguy89 (30) states his profession is "working for the man". The only information provided in the *About Me* section of Niagaraguy89's profile is, "Looking for masc and dl straight or bi guys from the area for something casual [sic]."[14] These types of answers regarding profession are present in nineteen of the profiles included in this sample; all but three of whom solely sought sex. Subjects seeking relationships may provide further information about their career or economic successes into the *About Me* section. In the *About Me* section, subjects might link hard work ethics and success to their masculinity. For example, Aussie2108 (28) writes:

> I am a young, ambitious, and driven professional. I've got degrees in international relations and law, and I work for an Australian University doing their admissions and recruitment for the USA and Canada. I get to travel a lot for work, but also love my time at home with friends and playing hockey. I like to live life to the full and have been told I have a switch that controls everything I do ... it's either on, or turbo. I work-out often and I've been working hard to build some muscle.

[14] "dl" is an acronym for "down-low" which is a request for discretion.

A central theme of dating profiles such as this is the aspect of employment and economic success. Harris (1997) claims that modern homosexuality "is at heart crassly materialistic" (p. 6). Fullick (2013) found that heteronormative discourses on masculinity promote gendered representations by heterosexual men emphasizing professional ambition and conspicuous consumption. In these types of gendered representations to find a relationship, romantic companionship includes the desire for a man who is economically ambitious.

For MSM not yet into their professional lives because of their age, education is presented as a signifier of success attributed to their masculinity. All but five subjects under the age of 25 in the sample did not specify a profession, but stated that they are students in the *Profession* category. Education is a mandatory category for subjects to complete in order to publish a dating profile. MSM in their late-teens to early-twenties seeking relationships present their education and vacations as signifiers of their success and a prelude to their upcoming professional and economic successes. For example, bankerboy21 (21) writes,

> I am a young professional guy, just finishing up my undergrad in Business. My family and close friends are very important to me, as is my work. Since summer has finally arrived, so has beach volleyball season. So you're more than likely going to find me on the beach after work most days. Most would say I am a pretty down to earth, masculine guy… Down the road I would like to have a career that allows me the flexibility to be creative within my job and create things or make day to day tasks easier for the everyday individual… Someone I would like to meet would have qualities similar to mine in that they would be down to earth and level-headed, masculine, success-driven and professional.

Like other professional-based dating profiles, the emphasis in both the description of the self and the desired other is economic success. Queer scholars have argued that neoliberal homonormative MSM subjectivities favour economic success in the same way they espouse heteronormative discourses of masculinity. *POF* including categories such as

Profession and *Education* along with the performative representations of MSM in the sample reinforces normative values of economic success as a part of the intersection of MSM masculinities.

The presentation of hegemonic masculinity and economic success on dating profiles is not limited to the textual representations of the self. Images uploaded to the profiles of men seeking relationships often display the men as well-kempt and wearing business-casual or professional attire. Images also include outdoor adventures and worldwide destinations such as the Eiffel Tower. For images taken in or around the home, subjects uploaded images to their profiles which include materialistic goods such as well-kempt and nicely decorated homes, expensive cars or electronics. In total, forty percent of the sample, all of whom sought a relationship, presented economic success in some way. Only twenty-one percent of the sample claimed working-class or blue-collar representations or lifestyle and thirty-nine percent of sample gave little to no information to suggest socio-economic status. Based on the information on their profile in the "Intent" category and About Me where they are more explicit about finding a man for casual sex, this sub-population mostly uses the site for casual sex. The difference in or consideration of economic class between those seeking relationships and those seeking sex suggests a normative hierarchy in the intersectionality of masculinities within the sample collected.

Intersectionality of Masculinities - Age

Age is an important intersectional attribute among MSM in online dating subjectivities. Homonormativity and aesthetics favour men in their twenties and thirties (see Mowlabocus, 2010; Cassidy, 2013). In my sample, a majority of the population ranged

between eighteen and thirty-nine while twenty subjects stated that they were in their forties or fifties and only one subject identified as in his sixties. Partially due to the digital divide (Chen & Wellman, 2005; Servon, 2002), this distribution of age among subjects is a common trend in Internet dating (Pingel *et al*., 2012). Computer literacy, access and an overall general understanding of the Internet and socializing online may contribute to the distribution of age in my sample.

In addition to the digital divide and homonormative discourses governing the age of subjects on the site, heteronormative discourses embedded in *POF* regulate who a subject may connect with on the site with regards to age. As of May 2013, *POF* changed its messaging policies by blocking subjects from contacting anyone greater than fourteen years difference (Bignell & Hastings, 2013, May 21). Messaging someone who is more than fourteen years older or younger in age resulted in receiving a response from the site which read, "There is no reason for a 50 year old man to contact 18-year-old women. The majority of messages sent outside those age ranges are all about hook-ups" (Bignell & Hastings, 2013, May 21). This change was recognized by subjects within the sample collected. According to DiscreetNiagaraFun (44), "*POF* is not allowing chats or emails if there is a +\-14 yrs age gap; aka censorship..." This restriction on *POF* prevents possible sexual fetishes held by some homosexual men such as the daddy/son relationships. The *Code of Conduct* in the *Terms and Conditions* of this site states,

> You will not use the Service to engage in any form of…offensive behavior, including but not limited to the posting of communications, pictures or recordings which contain libelous, slanderous, abusive or defamatory statements, or racist, pornographic, obscene, or otherwise offensive language.

The vague and subjective terms laid out in the Code of Conduct fail to clarify what behaviour constitutes as "obscene". Based on the website's age policy, "obscene" can be interpreted as connecting with someone who is fourteen years their senior or junior. This form of governance from the site produces sexual subjectivities acceptable in a wider normative script.

Intersectionality of Masculinities – Race

Other embodied signifiers which are associated with masculinity are race (Connell, 1995) and health (Zeglin, 2015). While *POF* profiles contain a mandatory section for subjects to input their *Ethnicity*, posters made little mention of race or ethnic backgrounds beyond the mandatory drop-down menu. Only one subject described his mixed ethnic background while only one subject stated a preference for white men. Within the drop-down menu, all but six men identify as *Caucasian*. While the significantly low number of non-white subjects is unsurprising considering the demographics of the Niagara Region, the "Otherness" of non-white is recognizable within the sample collected. For example, Zipang (66), a self-identified Asian in his sixties states, "I do not have any gay friends in the city so most of the time, I am alone." In cases like this, the Internet may provide more options for MSM to overcome geographic and social barriers to meet others with similar sexual interests (see Gudelunas, 2012). However, due to the lack of representations explicitly discussing race, I can make no conclusions on whether or not this site successfully offers the opportunity for subjects to overcome geographic and social behaviours as it relates to race.

Intersectionality of Masculinities – Sexually Transmitted Infections

One of the most significant forces in the discursive construction of MSM bodies in the last thirty years is HIV/AIDS (Mowlabocus, 2010). However, since *POF* design seemingly consists primarily of heteronormative processes, the website provides no information or warnings regarding HIV/AIDS or other STIs.[15] As such, the heteronormative discourses embedded in *POF* regulating MSM bodies may be silencing HIV/AIDS in the representations of MSM in this sample. Unsurprisingly then, only three subjects make any mention of STIs in their dating profiles; all three of whom solely sought sex. In two of these three dating profiles, the subjects represented themselves as being "clean" or "D&D Free" and the other requested that the other be "clean". The result of low numbers of MSM presenting information regarding STIs online is consistent with other studies (see Gudelunas, 2005).

The lack of mentions of STIs, even if it is just self-identifying or requesting someone "clean", is concerning. Scholars across disciplines found an ongoing correlation throughout North America of increased spread of STIs associated with MSM meeting online (see Brown *et al*., 2015; Rosenbaum *et al*., 2013). Considering that the spread of STIs continue to be an issue for MSM cruising online, connecting on heteronormative sites that fail to include discussions or warnings about STIs to inform subjects and regulate online representations may contribute to higher risk sexual behaviour.

The concern of the spread of STIs from meeting people online is a part of the mediation of privacy. The three subjects who expose their "clean" status or sought others who are

[15] While STIs exist among heterosexuals, they are marginalized in heteronormative discourse (e.g. abstinence until marriage).

"clean" also offered and sought discretion from their partners. bicuriousguy1967 (46), for example, writes, "Looking for other descreet guys to play with,just nsa fun,new to this and want to try everything with a guy,must be clean". The only things bicuriousguy is seeking, according to his dating profile, are "[discreet]" and "clean" men. Requests such as these demonstrate the intertwined connection between the material and virtual body of subjects. Contracting STIs challenges the discretion sought.

Mediating Privacy – Seeking Relationships versus Seeking Sex

Internet security is a common concern throughout the modern world. Social media, including dating profiles, include significant amounts of personal information which may be easily accessible online. Cassidy (2013) argues that MSM mediate privacy online when constructing representations of themselves on social media sites. Being recognized online as an MSM imposes the possible risk of being inadvertently "outed". However, there are significant geographic and social advantages to connecting to others through social media. As retro780 (23) began his *About Me*, "How do you even meet people in Niagara anymore?" Social media provides MSM the opportunity to meet other men with similar sexual interests that may otherwise not be afforded to them. As such, the increased accessibility to others through social media may outweigh the risks of possibly being inadvertently "outed".

Along with being a free-to-use dating website, profiles are completely accessible by anyone that accesses the *POF* site. On its homepage, *POF* displays several women's profiles that are fully accessible; visitors may browse other profiles without signing up. The only aspect of the website which non-profile holders do not have the access to are the

Message or *Chat* capabilities with others on the site. As such, any image or text a subject includes in their dating profile is accessible and visible to anyone else on the Internet. Since *POF* does not allow subjects to alter their privacy settings, privacy may only be mediated through self-censorship within the content provided on the dating profile.

This research finds that subjects represented on *POF* mediate privacy on the site through self-censorship differently based on their relationship intents. Men seeking meaningful relationships limit self-censorship, whereas men solely seeking sex rely heavily on self-censorship in their representations to conceal their material bodies and identities. For example, almost eighty-five percent of MSM seeking a relationship of some type included images of themselves in their profile. In comparison, eighty-one percent of the MSM solely seeking casual sex included no images in their profiles. Only nine percent of MSM solely seeking casual sex included images of themselves while the remainder included generic images of material items (e.g. a motorcycle). Additionally, no MSM seeking only sex within the sample collected include images containing their faces. This finding is consistent with Cassidy's (2013) finding that men seeking sex with other men do not include images of their face online. Surprisingly, only four MSM seeking sex requested or offered discretion. However, discretion may be assumed considering the concealment of material identities in the representations in the sample collected. What becomes evident from the difference in the mediation of privacy between the two groups is how sexual behaviours and representations are governed and regulated as being something to be hidden.

As previously discussed, heteronormativity regulates homosexual bodies to desexualize embodied representations (Bell & Valentine, 1995). For example, municipalities and

organizers hosting Pride events have attempted to ban public nudity and overt sexual representations (see Bell & Valentine, 1995). Additionally, heteronormative and homonormative discourses favour traditional, homonormative relationships such as monogamy and marriage while opposing acts such as cruising for sex (Duggan, 2002; Brown, 2008). For example, Fullick (2013) found that heteronormativity in heterosexual representations typically presents gendered expressions that are desexualized and focus on long-term, monogamous relationships. These normative discourses on relationships have become prevalent in certain LGBTQ communities. In the last thirty years, as homonormativity has become commonplace in gay villages, gentrification has altered public spaces traditionally used for cruising to prevent this particular behaviour (see Brown, 2008). As is evident in the sample, heteronormative website design and policies regulate these sexual behaviours and representations similar to the gentrification of urban public spaces. While these behaviours and representations still exist, MSM participating in these behaviours must take additional precautions to prevent outsiders from discovering their sexual acts (see Brown, 2008). MSM on strict heteronormative sites seeking casual sex seemingly have to take similar precautions when cruising online.

Each subject seeking traditional homonormative relationships includes extensive personal information. Some extensive personal information may include their phone numbers, exact positions and places of employment; links to other social media pages of theirs, e-mail addresses, images of their faces and even their names. In contrast, dating profiles of men solely seeking sex consistently contain as little information as possible to publish a profile on *POF*. For example, discrete1991 (22) repeated himself to fulfil the minimum amount of characters in the *About Me* section by writing, “Looking for fun around

Niagara region. Student here for summer Looking for fun around Niagara region. Student here for summer Looking for fun around Niagara region. Student here for summer Looking for fun around Niagara region. Student here for summer." Not only does the subject's username demonstrate that they are discrete, but the *About Me* contains no identifiable information other than they are a student in the Niagara peninsula. The stark difference between MSM seeking relationships and those solely seeking sex in regards to the mediation of privacy online is that MSM solely seeking sex attempt to conceal their material identities, whereas those seeking traditional relationships make no such attempts. This difference might be interpreted as MSM participating in casual sex contrast heteronormative sensibilities.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter analyzed one hundred dating profiles on *POF* collected for this case study. Considering the architecture and policies of the website, the performativity of virtual bodies and notions of online privacy, this chapter presents how heteronormative discourses embedded the sites and performativity regulates MSM subjectivities in the sample collected. As the data demonstrates, performative representations present what resembles an intersection of archetypal masculinity. Additionally, the data demonstrates that heteronormative discourses embedded in the site limit the queer expressions of MSM solely seeking sex while favouring MSM representations of those seeking homonormative relationships, such as monogamy and marriage.

Although particular to place and time, archetypal masculinity within this research is defined as men presenting their bodies as muscular/fit, white and younger with interests in physical or outdoor activities and a strong professional drive for economic success.

The website design and policies of *POF* governs masculine representations by enforcing subjects to select from pre-determined options in a drop-down menu in categories such as *Body Type* and *Profession*. Effeminate men are rarely represented within the sample collected and no subject specified a desire for effeminate male bodies or performances. As such, in order for effeminate MSM to be successful in finding a mate, they would either need to conform their embodied representations on this site to hegemonic masculine subjectivities or access a site more favourable to their effeminate subjectivities.

Heteronormative discourses within the design and policies of the site govern particular subjectivities within the site. Heteronormative website design with tools like chemistry tests, promotion of lasting relationships and the lack of a sexually explicit option in the drop-down menu for the *Seeking* section, along with website policies which prohibits pornography and "obscene" behaviour and prevents subjects from connecting with those fourteen years in age difference regulates the representations and sexual behaviours of MSM on this site. While the number of subjects seeking a relationship and the number of subjects seeking sex are almost equal in this research, the presentation differs greatly between the two groups. Unlike those seeking relationships, and who freely present their identities on *POF*, those seeking casual sex mediate privacy through self-censorship to conceal their material identities. Subjects conceal their identity by not including images of their faces, by only providing superficial information in the *About Me* section, and by requesting discretion from others. As such, this difference can be understood that the heteronormative discourses in the site limit the queer expressions of MSM using the site to seek sex. The performativity of mediating privacy with the desire for discretion

(re)produces notions that particular behaviours, such as casual sex between MSM, are to be concealed. For MSM seeking casual sex, privacy becomes a central facet in their representations online.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

Introduction

The analyses of the gendered and sexual representations of Niagara MSM provide insight into some of the processes governing the subjectivities of virtual bodies. I argue that heteronormative discourses imbedded in the websites examined in this work govern the MSM subjectivities of those occupying these sites. However, digital spaces online are not isolated spaces. These digital spaces include complex relationships between various geographies of scales and the lived experiences of subjects in those digital spaces. These relationships constitute an understanding of the place and the embedded normative discourses in them. The previous chapters examined how these heteronormative discourses regulate MSM representations by focusing on website designs and policies, performativity of virtual bodies and online privacy.

Because this thesis examines two sites, the aim of this chapter is to bring the two analyses together to sketch out a preliminary discussion as to how heteronormative discourses embedded in digital sites govern MSM representations of gender and sexuality. A second aim of this chapter is to provide concluding thoughts on this research project. In the first part of this chapter, I reintroduce and deconstruct the two sites of study spaces informed by heteronormative discourses that offer MSM a space to connect with each other. I re-examine how the differences and similarities between the two sites affect the representations of MSM. Comparing the two sites provides insight into the mechanics of governance that (re)produce MSM subjects in digital sites. This work is not intended to

be conclusive. Rather, it is a preliminary framework to examine digital sites for future work that needs to be done in queer geographies.

(Re)producing MSM Subjects Online

Queer geographers have increasingly been deconstructing the Internet to expose power relations governing subjects (Knopp, 2007). However, queer scholarship examining the Internet typically focuses on material spaces and bodies. This leaves a gap of knowledge in geographical queer scholarship towards the examination of gendered and sexual representations online. This thesis seeks to address this knowledge in queer geographical research. In order to deconstruct the power relations governing online subjectivities, I examined the architecture of websites, performativity of virtual bodies and notions of online privacy. In addition, I consider the occularcentric medium of the Internet that contributes to production of "pornographic remediation of the gay male body" (see Mowlabocus, 2010, p. 60). The Internet as an occularcentric medium provides a space for MSM bodies to be produced and consumed by other men seeking men.

Social networking sites such as the personal advertisement site, *Craigslist*, and the dating website, *POF*, provides a digital space for subjects to produce embodied representations of gender and sexuality. They have both text and visuals to produce digital gendered and sexual bodies. Drawing from queer theory and queer geographies, I suggest that there is a discursive relation between virtual sites and the embodied subjectivities online. Both sites examined in this work provide services to heterosexuals and homosexuals. Since these sites are not exclusively homosexual sites, there are seemingly heteronormative

discursive understandings of bodies and relationships informing the processes in the sites. These discourses are included in the websites designs and policies.

In order to examine the website design, it is important to recognize how the site promotes itself. For example, *POF* boasts its popularity and success in facilitating lasting relationships on its homepage (*PlentyOfFish*, 2016). At the time this research was conducted, *POF* expressed heteronormative discourses through the design of the site to attract heterosexual men by displaying thumbnails on its homepage of women's profiles on the site who are seeking men. *Craigslist*, however, is much more liberal in its purpose. *Craiglsist* is a site which offers anyone with access to the site to buy, sell or trade just about anything (*Craigslist*, 2015, factsheet). However, even with a more liberal purpose, *Craigslist* contains, as does *POF*, heteronormative discourses in the site which limits the queer representations of MSM.

Both sites examined contain a similar user-interface to produce representations. Both sites use drop-down menus for subjects to select from to produce representations of the self. As Cassidy (2013) found, drop-down menus force subjects to select and conform to pre-existing discourses in order to produce legible representations. While this is less restrictive on *Craigslist* as it offers selections such as transgender and allows subjects to seek more than one gender, drop-down menus on *POF* rely on heteronormative discourses of gender and sexuality to produce representations. By that, I mean that at the time the sample was collected, subjects had to choose from binary options of sex and could only seek subjects of a particular gender. Additionally, *POF* includes mandatory drop-down menus and free-form text boxes which include *Profession* and *Education*; two items which give some insight into the class of subjects. Having these mandatory

categories produces a hierarchy of masculinity with the intersection of class on *POF* which is absent from representations on *Craigslist.* As such, the findings in this work regarding drop-down menus reaffirm Cassidy's (2013) findings; drop-down menus produce representations within a normative discursive framework of power and knowledge.

With similar processes between the two sites of study in producing representations, both samples collected present an intersection of archetypal masculinity. As presented in the analysis chapters, hegemonic normative discourses of gender and sexuality dominate representations within the samples. Drop-down menus and the repetitive stylization of bodies through similar images and text in available free-form sections typically presented normalizing masculine subjectivities seeking the same. The repetitive stylization of archetypal masculine men governed by heteronormativity in the virtual sites they inhabit differed mostly through the mediation of online privacy based on their relationship-type desire.

Heteronormativity regulates homosexual bodies to submit to desexualized representations tolerable to the heterosexual gaze (Bell & Valentine, 1995). Heteronormative regulation is evident in the difference of representations between MSM seeking relationships and those seeking sex. MSM seeking casual sex on both sites of study mediated surveillance through thorough self-censorship while requesting and/or offering discretion with potential partners. Self-censorship on both sites by MSM seeking sex include providing only superficial information, completing only the bare minimum to produce a representation while trying to convey their desires and excluding identifiable information in images if an image is included. The main difference between MSM seeking sex on

Craigslist and MSM seeking sex on *POF* is that representations on *POF* are much more blanched. Website policies on *POF* prohibiting pornography and obscene content prevents MSM from publishing dating profiles with explicit sexual content such as images containing nudity or vulgar language. As such, even those attempting to present queer sexual behaviours on *POF* do so in a heteronormative structure of power.

In contrast to MSM seeking sex, MSM seeking relationships, found mainly in the *POF* sample, made little to no effort to conceal their material identities through self-censorship. These representations consistently presented images with the subject's face and may provide their name, profession, and links to other social media sites or forms of communication. As such, MSM subjectivities that conform to the heteronormative gaze are less limited than MSM subjects seeking sex. Considering almost every MSM seeking uncommitted relationships on both sites attempt to conceal their material identities and those seeking relationships disclose their identities reveals an underlying power relation governing the embodied representations of MSM online. Heteronormative discourses embedded in the sites examined in this work limit the queer expressions of MSM seeking sex.

In this section, I have discussed the heteronormative discursive powers governing online embodied representations of Niagara Region MSM in the sample collected. In a sense, digital places offering a space for MSM to connect are similar to material gay districts and venues that queer geographers have examined since the 1990s. While these places offer subjects possibilities that may otherwise be unavailable to them, heteronormative power relations embedded in place regulate and limit particular representations. As such, the Internet may not be the utopia for MSM as it was once thought.

Suggestions for Future Research

My research exposes the rich, untapped data available to geographers online. Social geographers are increasingly turning to the Internet technologies to examine the complex interactions between the material and the digital (see, for example Drushel, 2010; Gray, 2010; Downing, 2013; Graham, 2013. However, this research tends to focus on how digital layering of information on material space influences material interactions. This is partially due to the lack of a conceptual tool within the geographic discipline to analyze how virtual spaces govern embodied representations of subjects online. This work presents analytical tools to analyze how virtual spaces govern embodied subjectivities online by assessing the architecture of websites and discursive power relations embedded within these sites.

This research examined two sites that offer services to both heterosexuals and homosexuals. As Downing (2013) points out, geographers have neglected to examine sites that solely offer services to homosexuals. This research found that heteronormative discourses regulate MSM representations in the samples collected. My findings raise the question, how do homosexual-specific niche sites regulate MSM representations? Research on sites specifically for homosexuals may provide insight into other normative discourses informing and regulating the digital embodied representations of subjects. MSM are active users of online media (Grov *et al*., 2012). As such, there are plethoras of niche websites which cater to MSM. Employing the analytical tools presented in this work with a queer geographic lens to sites catering MSM could produce interesting results.

This research is limited in its focus by only examining MSM. While MSM are active users of online media, other minority groups utilize digital sites to connect in today's modern world. As expressed in the findings of this research, privacy is a central characteristic of MSM online representations. However, MSM have a particular history of mediating privacy due to the historical [and current] criminality of their sexual behaviour (Chauncey, 1994; Mowlabocus, 2010; Cassidy, 2013). It is likely that privacy is not particular to MSM; subjects from other category types may be concerned with online privacy. Due to the social and legal differences, though, I question how privacy contributes to the representations of other social groups. The methodology employed in this work can be used to analyze online representations of category types other than MSM. By assessing the website designs and discursive power relations within those sites, researchers may be able to explore the power relations governing the subjectivities of those occupying those sites.

As the findings regarding age of subjects in the samples collected demonstrate, MSM over the age of thirty-five are underrepresented. Since the research was conducted, all permanent traditional gay spaces in the Niagara Region permanently closed and there have been no known efforts since 2014 to open any new venues. This raises the question, where and how are MSM over the age of thirty-five connecting? Are MSM of this demographic using other niche sites to connect or are there networks in material space being used to connect with each other? Considering the digital divide (Servon, 2002; Chen & Wellman, 2005), research on how this particular demographic connects with each other in the Internet age could render interesting and important results.

This research attempted to provide a methodology for geographers for examining embodied subjectivities online. While the methods employed here provided fruitful information, it is by no means exhaustive or complete. My sample merely scratches the surface of the ongoing process of the production of embodied representations of gender and sexuality online. The semi-structured interviews I had hoped to employ could have provided deeper insight into the ongoing process of producing self-representations online and the private interactions between subjects. This methodological limitation and the findings in this work leave many unanswered questions. How are websites chosen? What are the thought-processes and reactions when producing online representations? Are online representations altered after initial publication? If representations are altered, why and how are they altered? Do subjects have multiple social media sites? If so, how do representations differ from one site to the next? Does having multiple sites alter how one mediates privacy online (see, for example, Cassidy, 2013)? Now recognizing the significance of privacy for MSM online, other methods, such as surveys with optional probing questions, which probe deeper but maintain a subject's anonymity may prove to be successful in finding answers for these questions. Understanding the local and online culture of the group the researcher is examining is crucial in developing a successful online methodology.

Concluding Comments

My work has attempted to examine how representations of gender and sexuality of MSM are governed. Chapter 1 of this thesis introduced the material geographic region that this work examines, the Niagara Region. The Niagara Region consists of diverse municipalities in terms of population, economics and transportation, to name a few.

Although my work is concerned with online representations, the Internet is not an isolated space. A complex relationship of various geographic scales contributes to the representations produced online. The introductory chapter also briefly introduces the two sites of study, *Craigslist* and *POF*. While these sites provide a digital space for MSM to connect, neither are exclusively homosexual sites. As such, they are organized with a particular set of discourses. It is these discourses, I assert, that govern the subjectivities of MSM online. The argument presented throughout this thesis is that heteronormative discourses embedded in the sites of study govern the subjectivities of MSM sampled.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework employed in this thesis to present my argument. My work is planted in queer theory to deconstruct performative representations of MSM to reveal heteronormative power relations governing MSM subjectivities in the samples collected. The second chapter considers how socio-spatial relations constitute particular subjectivities. The literature review chapter also presents the conceptualization of the Internet in this work. Contemporary conceptualizations of the Internet like hybrid space acknowledge that digital space and information is connected to material space. However, these conceptualizations typically leave analyses of the Internet unidirectional as information that compliments material geographies. As such, I consider how website architecture regulates representations online. Lastly, the second chapter discusses the intersectionality of masculinities. This discussion presents a hierarchy of masculine subjectivities that inform MSM bodies. The three sections discussed in Chapter 2 inform the methodology and analyses included in this thesis.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology used in this thesis to gain insight into how heteronormative discourses regulate the representations of MSM in the samples collected.

As the third chapter discusses, I employed a Foucauldian discourse analysis on the text and images included in the representations of MSM to expose how heteronormative discourses govern the representations of MSM in my work. Personal advertisements and dating profiles were collected in September and early October 2013 until data saturation was met. It is important to note that due to the speed of technological advances, the data collected is particular to when it was collected.

Chapters 4 and 5 present discussions of the samples collected on *Craigslist* and *POF*, respectively. As the sample collected on *Craigslist* demonstrates, heteronormative website designs, policies and accessibility by the general population regulate an intersection of archetypal masculine MSM subjectivities. However, the hypersexual representations presented by MSM in the sample collected seemingly counter heteronormative expectations of MSM bodies and behaviours. As such, almost every MSM seeking casual sex managed their privacy through self-censorship to prevent recognition of their material identities.

Findings in Chapter 5 are relatively similar to the findings in Chapter 4 in regards to gender and sexual representations. The strict heteronormative discourses embedded in the website design and policies of *POF* regulate an intersection of MSM masculine subjectivities. However, due to the extent of information required and purpose of the site, a hierarchy of masculinity is present favouring economic success and homonormative relationships. Analysis of the data on *POF* reveals that queer expressions by MSM on that site are limited in comparison to those who present homonormative representations and relationship desires. Representations that challenge heteronormative expectations of MSM bodies and desires by seeking sex manage their privacy through self-censorship,

whereas MSM seeking homonormative relationships express themselves without concerns of concealing their material identities. This hierarchy of masculinity exposes underlying heteronormative power relations governing MSM representations online.

The sixth and final chapter of this thesis seeks to bring the two analyses together to expose how heteronormative discourses regulate MSM representations in the samples collected. This chapter pays careful attention to how heteronormative discourses embedded in the website design and policies, performativities of digital bodies and the management of online privacy limits the queer expressions of MSM seeking sex. I conclude by challenging previous notions of the Internet as a utopian space for marginalized populations by asserting that the Internet acts similar to material space in regulating bodies. Lastly, the concluding chapter provides suggestions for future research to grow from the methodology and findings included in this work. The Internet has become commonplace in today's modern Canadian society. Much of the population interacts with Internet technologies in some way each day. Further research that considers the intricate social relations constituted through material and digital interactions would help gain further insight into the complex relationship of the Internet and our social landscape.

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